



The influence of brand experiences on consumer-based brand equity

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Revised: 11 December 2019 / Accepted: 27 October 2020

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Abstract

In markets where products and services have become similar, with no major functional differences and where consumer choices are more and more influenced by emotional aspects rather than by rational thinking, experiences have surfaced as the main form of differentiation between companies. More than the inherent characteristics of products or services perse, brands become a source of differentiation of companies, with its role expanded from an assembly of attributes to a sum of experiences. This investigation in the experiential marketing area aims to understand the dimensions of the experiences that have an influence on consumers and how do these experiences have influence on consumer-based brand equity. Based on a quantitative study, the results show that brand experience has a positive influence on consumer-based brand equity. Sensory and emotional experiences evidenced a higher influence in all the dimensions of brand equity. Multigroup analysis also shows that intellectual experience triggers brand equity consumers in consumer with positive brand behavior.

Keywords Experiential marketing · Branding · Brand equity · Consumer experience

Introduction

Nowadays, as products and services became very similar in terms of their functional attributes, marketing began to emphasize the non-functional characteristics of products and services and the creation of pleasant and memorable experiences (Brakus, Schmitt & Zhang 2008; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). In addition, consumers not only buy products and services but also their brands, establishing emotional relationships and using them to express their personality and their social-self (Delgado-Ballester & Sabiote, 2015; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Schmitt, et al., 2015; Swaminathan, Stilley & Ahluwalia, 2009; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005). Hence, the experiences provided by brands have been presented as one of the main

forms of differentiation between companies, through the creation of experiences that appeal to the consumer sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviors, evoked by several brand-related stimuli.

Although there are several studies showing that brand experiences have a positive effect on different variables related to the brand, such as purchase intent, satisfaction, trust or brand loyalty (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello 2009; Ha & Perks 2005; Keng, Tran & Thi 2013; Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon 2002; Şahin, Zehir & Kitapçı 2011; Sands, Oppewal & Beverland 2008; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010), there are few studies that analyze the impact of brand experiences on consumer-based brand equity (Cleff et al. 2014; Kumar, Dash & Purwar 2013; Moreira, Fortes & Santiago 2017; Ding & Tseng 2015). Given this context and the need of more empirical studies that analyze the influence that the different brand experience dimensions have on the different constructs that compose consumer-based brand equity (Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Cleff et al. 2014; Hultén 2011; Keng et al. 2013; Kumar et al. 2013; Şahin et al. 2011; Schmitt 2009; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010), this article aims to explore the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity.

The investigation is inserted in the experiential marketing area and its main objective is to analyze the influence that the different dimensions of brand experiences have on

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consumer-based brand equity through the models of brand experience from Brakus et al. (2009) and consumer-based brand equity from Yoo and Donthu (2001). In addition, it aims to understand whether there are differences between the perceptions that female and male consumers have of brand experiences and, consequently, of the value that the brand represents for themselves.

In specific terms and considering the models of Brakus et al. (2009) and Yoo and Donthu (2001), it intends to achieve the following objectives: understand whether brand experience dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral) have a positive influence on consumer-based brand equity dimensions (brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand awareness/brand associations); analyze whether the perceptions that consumers have of brand experiences and, consequently, of brand equity differ between gender (female and male). Thus, this article intends to contribute to the increase in knowledge in the areas of brand experience and consumer-based brand equity.

Theoretical framework

Experiential marketing

In contrast to traditional marketing that emphasizes the rational decisions of consumers based on functional benefits of products and services, experiential marketing “view consumers as rational and emotional human beings who are concerned with achieving pleasurable experiences” (Schmitt 1999, p.53). It highlights the emotional dimension of consumer behavior and the value of creating experiences that emphasize non-functional characteristics or certain aspects of the context in which products and services are used (Brakus et al. 2008; Cleff et al. 2014). Nowadays, with technological developments, the emergence of several communication and distribution channels and the high functional similarity between products and services from different categories, consumers have started to make their purchase decisions not only to respond to functional needs, but to have experiences that stimulate sensations and emotions around the consume of products or services (Brakus et al. 2008; Schmitt 1999; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010).

Experiential marketing not only addresses the desires and needs of consumers, but also their self-image, social goals, dormant emotions and their deepest desires and values. Its focus is to extract the product essence and apply it to tangible, physical and interactive experiences. As a result, customers have different perceptions and react to several brand-related stimuli (Williams 2006; Srinivasan & Srivastava 2010; Yuan & Wu 2008). Companies begin to realize that consumer decisions are increasingly influenced by emotions rather than rational thoughts and try to evoke a strong

emotional response through several brand-related stimuli (Shukla 2007). This marketing perspective has recorded a continuous growth within companies, as it allows to create value for the brand and the consumer by offering new ways to customers interact with brands, which also leads to a better return of investment (Witthaus 2004). In addition, it has a positive influence on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (You-Ming 2010) and to increase the interactions and emotional connections with the consumer companies must incorporate experiential marketing techniques (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus 2006).

Brand experiences

In the marketing literature, the experience concept has been explored in different contexts. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first to introduce the idea of experience in the scope of marketing, arguing that beyond the rational component, consumption also includes an experiential component, considering that the consumption experience is a phenomenon that embraces the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun, focused on the symbolic, hedonic and esthetic nature of consumption. Pine and Gilmore (1998) highlighted the emerging of an “experience economy” (p.97), stressing that although products and services are economic offerings external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, involving the consumer on an emotional, physical and intellectual level.

In a broader view, Schmitt (1999) states that consumer experiences are based on five dimensions—sensory, emotional, intellectual, behavioral and social—considering each dimension as a strategic experiential module that companies can use to create different types of experiences for the consumers. Although distinct, these modules must be related to create holistic consumer experiences and implemented by the “experience providers” which include communications, visual and verbal identity and symbols, physical environments, digital media and people (Schmitt 1999). The consumer experience is a multidimensional concept that results from the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory and social consumer responses to a company’s offerings during the entire purchase process (Lemon & Verhoef 2016). According to Gentile et al. (2007) the consumer experience translates a set of interactions (at rational, emotional, sensory, physical and spiritual levels) between a client and a product, a company or part of the organization in the different moments of contact (purchase and post-purchase).

However, consumers no longer buy products and services but rather their brands. In this context, Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualized brand experience as the “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (e.g., colors, shapes, typefaces, designs, slogans,



mascots, brand characters), that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments" (p.53). The authors highlight four brand experience dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral. Sensory experience appeals to the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch), the emotional experience includes feelings, emotions and moods, the intellectual experience appeals to the intellect and creativity and the behavioral experience stimulates physical actions, behaviors and lifestyles.

To create a brand experience, it is essential a sense of brand identity. "The product or service should be known not by its individual properties, but by its brand" (Srinivasan & Srivastava 2010, p.194). Thus, brand experience concept captures the very essence of a brand, which implies a new role of the brand as an experience provider and not just as an identifier (Schmitt 2009; Schmitt et al. 2014). Brand experiences do not occur only during consumption but rather when there is an interaction with a brand, directly or indirectly. Additionally, they vary in strength and intensity (existing brand experiences stronger or intense than others), in valence (some experiences are more positive than others), in their origin (spontaneous or deliberated) and duration (Brakus et al. 2009; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010).

Brands should focus on creating experiences related to the consumers lifestyle and their personality, as consumers prefer a product when the brand image is consistent with their self-concept (Tsai, Chang & Ho, 2015). In addition, consumers become emotionally attached to brands, establish deep and meaningful relationships with them and use brands to express their personality and their social-self (Delgado-Ballester & Sabiote 2015; Escalas & Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Schmitt et al. 2015; Swaminathan et al. 2009; Thomson et al. 2005). Consequently, two people don't have the same experience because experience dimensions are interpreted individually (Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun 2011).

Brakus et al. (2009) based their work about brand experiences on the five type of experiences distinguished by Schmitt (1999). However, instead of considering them as strategic modules, they adopted a consumer perspective viewing these experiences as the subjective, internal and behavioral responses of the consumer. For this reason, this research adopted Brakus et al. (2009) definition that distinguishes four brand experience dimensions—sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral.

Brand equity

The existing brand equity definitions can be broadly divided in two perspectives: a financial perspective that stress the economic value of the brand to the firm; a consumer perspective that highlights the brand value for the consumer (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey 2005). Although Aaker (1991)

and Keller (1993) establish their brand equity concept differently, both base their theory on the consumer's perspective.

Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities that are linked to the brand's name and symbol, which can add or subtract value of products or services and provides value for the consumer and the company. The brand assets represent the main form for brand equity creation, consisting in five dimensions, namely, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand assets. For the author, brand loyalty is defined as the connection that a consumer establishes with a brand, brand awareness is the ability of a consumer to recognize or recall that a brand is part of a certain product category, perceived quality is defined as the subjective evaluation that a consumer has of the quality or superiority of a brand when compared with the competition and brand associations represent anything linked in memory to a brand.

Keller (1993) enhances the importance of understanding brand equity from a consumer perspective, defining consumer-based brand equity "as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (p.2). Brand knowledge is divided into two components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is related to the ability of consumers to remember and recognize a brand, constituted by two categories: brand recall that is the consumer's ability to remember a brand when suggested a product category or other characteristic; brand recognition that is the ability of the consumer to recognize prior contact with the brand when given as a cue. Brand image is defined as the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers retain in their memory and those associations can be classified into three categories—attributes, benefits and attitudes—that should be analyzed in relation to their favorability, strength and uniqueness. The attributes represent the descriptive features that characterize the brand for the consumer and that are involved in the purchase or consumption process, the benefits correspond to the personal value that consumers attach to product or service attributes and the attitudes represent the consumers' overall evaluation of the brand (Keller, 1993).

Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995) define brand equity as the perception that consumers have of the overall superiority of a product from a specific brand when compared with other brands, distinguishing five characteristics of brand equity: it is related to consumer perceptions; it is related to the overall value associated with the brand; the overall value stems from the brand name and not only from its physical aspects; the brand equity is not absolute, but relative to the competition; it positively influences the financial performance of the brand.

Several authors (e.g., Yoo & Donthu 2001; Yoo, Donthu & Lee 2000; Washburn & Plank 2002; Pappu et al. 2005) defined brand equity based on Aaker (1991) and Keller



(1993) definitions, adopting a consumer-based brand equity perspective. Yoo and Donthu (2001) define brand equity as the different consumer responses between a focal brand and an unbranded product when both have the same level of attributes, composed by cognitive dimensions (brand awareness/brand associations and perceived quality) and a behavioral dimension (brand loyalty). Brand awareness is the ability for a consumer to recognize or recall that a brand is part of a specific category of products (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). Brand associations represent anything that a consumer retains in his mind related to a brand (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). Perceived quality reflects the consumer subjective evaluation of a product or service quality or overall superiority (Aaker 1991, 1996). Finally, brand loyalty is the consumer's tendency to be loyal to a brand, demonstrated by the intent to buy the brand as a main choice. However, the authors distinguish only three dimensions, attaching brand awareness and brand associations in the same dimension.

Regardless of the consumer-based brand equity definition, the literature seems consistent with the idea that brand equity is a set of associations or attitudes that a consumer has in relation to a brand, which leads to the development of cognitions and feelings toward the brand and contributes to the value that the brand represents to the consumer (Arvidsson 2006). Hence, based on a consumer perspective, this research adopted the definition of Yoo and Donthu (2001) that distinguishes three brand equity dimensions—brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand awareness/brand associations.

Conceptual model

In an increasingly competitive market where products in many categories are functionally highly similar, consumers started to base their buying decisions not only on functional characteristics, but mainly in the experiences around the products and services (Brakus et al. 2008; Schmitt, 1999; Morrison & Crane 2007; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010). On the other hand, as consumers no longer buy products and services but mainly their brands (Schmitt et al. 2015), the experiences provided by brands are fundamental for the consumer to create preferences for a brand and to stimulate future purchase decisions (Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 2009). This also implies a new approach of the brand as an experience provider and not as a mere identification symbol (Schmitt et al. 2014), which led companies to increase their investments in the creation and development of their brands and experiences in the last decades (Belén del Río, Vázquez & Iglesias 2001).

Schmitt (2015) argues that “consumer experiences have both materialistic and experiential components” (p.4). When consumers buy and consume products or services, they can obtain happiness and infer a psychological value to the

product or service based on both material and experiential characteristics (Schmitt 2015). However, as the functional characteristics of products and services become more similar, consumers are giving more emphasis to the experiences offered by brands (Morrison & Crane 2007; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010). Specifically, according to Brakus et al. (2009) brand experiences are the sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviors that result from brand-related stimuli perceived by consumers. Thus, brand experience involves the consumer's interaction with the brand directly or indirectly and in one or more touchpoints throughout the purchase cycle—pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. Palmer (2010) adds that the way consumers interpret experiences is influenced by the contexts in which the products or services are consumed. This has consequences in the way consumers assimilate experiences, interpret the brand and perceive the service quality (Morrison & Crane 2007; Palmer 2010; Şahin et al. 2011). Also, brand experiences affect the satisfaction judgments related to the past and influence the consumer loyalty toward the future (Brakus et al. 2009; Chen, Papazafeiropoulou, Chen, Duan & Liu 2014; Keng et al. 2013; Ramaseshan & Stein 2014).

“Experiential marketing is effective because it can attain brand loyalty by appealing to hedonic emotions and cognitive dimensions of brand equity” (Ding & Tseng 2015, p.1009). Thus, to harvest brand equity and consumer-brand identification, companies should focus on providing higher levels of experiential value, as it plays a more relevant role in the consumer-brand identification and in brand equity (Delgado-Ballester & Sabiote 2015).

In a study that integrated several experiential brands—such as Harley-Davidson, Nike, McDonald's or Ikea—Gentile et al. (2007) found that sensory dimension was the most important to consumers, although many of the brands revealed “complex experiences” by involving more than one dimension. Sensory brand experiences focus on differentiating, distinguishing and positioning brand in the human mind (Foster & McLelland 2015; Hultén 2011) and can influence a positive brand image and reinforce positive feelings (Hultén 2011; Moreira et al. 2017). Dolbec and Chebat (2013) add that positive brand experiences stimulate the consumer's senses, engaging them through emotions, cognitions and physical experiences. In fact, senses and emotions play an important role in the experiences differentiation because they allow consumers to give an immediate meaning to the brand (Moreira et al. 2017), existing several studies that highlight the positive influence of sensory experiences in brand awareness (Kumar et al. 2013), brand associations (Kumar et al. 2013; Chang & Chieng 2006), purchase intentions (Ong, Lee & Ramayah 2018) and consumer-based brand equity (Cleff et al. 2014; Iglesias, Markovic & Rialp 2018).

Additionally, the importance of the emotional dimension is also widely acknowledged among several authors (e.g.,



A-Qader, Omar & Rubel 2017; Ding & Tseng 2015; Cleff et al. 2014; Chang & Chieng 2006), because the emotional connection between a brand and the consumer plays a key role in building strong brands (Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Gentile et al. 2007; Hultén 2011), for both product and service brands (Bapat & Thanigan 2016). Iglesias, Singh and Batista-Foguet (2011) provided empirical evidence that the emotional dimension completely mediates brand experience and brand loyalty, suggesting that for brands achieve brand loyalty and consolidate affective bonds with their customers, they must invest in the emotional dimension of the communications and of the entire brand experience provided. Similarly, several authors emphasize the positive impact that emotional experiences have on brand associations (Chang & Chieng 2006; Kumar et al. 2013), perceived quality (Kumar et al. 2013), brand loyalty (Iglesias et al. 2011; Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Ong et al. 2018), repurchase intention (Ong et al. 2018) and consumer-based brand equity (A-Qader et al. 2017).

Moreover, intellectual and behavioral dimensions also have a prominent role influencing brand experiences, existing several authors that show the positive influence that these dimensions have on brand associations (Kumar et al., 2013; Chang & Chieng 2006), perceived quality (Kumar et al. 2013), brand evaluation (Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Holt 1995), consumer-based brand equity (Kumar et al. 2013; Cleff et al. 2014) and consequently, in brand loyalty (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Holt 1995). Cleff et al. (2014) further highlight that the experiential dimensions to which each brand appeals are conditioned by the functional characteristics of the products or services commercialized, which means that considering the nature of each product or service, there are always some experiential dimensions that are stronger and more evident than others.

There are several studies that empirically confirm a positive influence of brand experience dimensions in the different constructs of brand equity. For example, in a study that integrated several coffee chains stores, Chang and Chieng (2006) found that brand experiences have a significant impact on brand associations and in the image that the brand has for the consumer, stating that in order to maintain a consumer-brand relationship, companies must provide a holistic experience and establish the intended meanings of the brand in the consumers' minds. In an automobile context, Şahin et al. (2011) demonstrated that brand experiences have positive effects on consumer satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty. Delgado-Ballester and Sabiote (2015) also observed that brand experiences positively influence the consumer-based brand equity and a positive mouth-to-mouth, showing that the experiential value of products and services is more important than the functional value. In addition, brand experience has a significant direct and positive effect in brand

personality, consumer satisfaction, brand loyalty and in consumer-brand relationship (Başer, Cintamür & Arslan 2015; Keng et al. 2013; Ramaseshan & Stein 2014; Sözer & Civalek 2018). Ong, Salleh and Yusoff (2015) confirm a positive and direct relationship between brand experiences and brand loyalty, highlighting the importance of developing experiences considering the difficulty of replicating the intangible and experiential aspects of brand experiences.

However, although studies analyzing the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity are still reduced, some authors have explored this problem. In a context of event marketing, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) confirmed that brand experiences—sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral—are positively related to brand equity. In a hospital context, Kumar et al. (2013) observed that brand experience dimensions positively influence consumer-based brand equity. Similarly, Moreira et al. (2017) also confirm a significant relationship between brand experiences and brand equity, stating that by improving the experiences offered to consumers, brands can develop their image, the perceptions of their product quality and brand loyalty. Thus, brand experiences are a powerful instrument to attain brand loyalty because they appeal to the hedonic emotions and cognitive dimensions of brand equity (Ding & Tseng 2015). These results are consistent with Cleff et al. (2014) which show that brand experiences positively influence brand equity, emphasizing the high impact of sensory and emotional dimensions.

It is noted that research on brand experiences has gained considerable importance in recent years (Bapat & Thanigan 2016), because these experiences emerged as fundamental for the creation of brand preference that, consequently, influence the consumer behavior and brand equity (A-Qader et al. 2017; Gentile et al. 2007). In this way, brand experiences have become vital for the development of brand loyalty and to ensure the business sustainability (Ong et al. 2018). This shift to experiential marketing “broadens the role of the brand from a bundle of attributes to experiences” (Ebrahim et al. 2016, p.1230), leading consumers to choose certain brands based on the experiences they offer, which reveals the possibility of a direct causal relationship between brand experiences and their influence on consumer-based brand equity (Cleff et al. 2014; Ding & Tseng 2015). Providing consumers with unique and memorable experiences and establishing a positive customer-brand relationship has become one of the main challenges for companies (Wiedmann, Labenz, Haase & Hennigan 2018) and it is crucial that marketers understand how consumers experience brands and how that experience affects the value that the brand has for themselves, so they can adjust their marketing strategies, improve the experiences provided and consequently, lead to higher consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Bapat & Thanigan 2016; Cleff et al. 2014).



As previously mentioned, in Brakus et al. (2009) perspective, the brand experiences development includes four dimensions—sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that the best customer-brand relationships are affective or emotional and when brands do not only meet certain needs but create engaging experiences, consumers tend to remain loyal to the brand. Cleff et al. (2014) emphasize that although all brand experience dimensions have a positive impact on brand loyalty, sensory experiences play a central role. In fact, several authors argue that brand experiences play a key role in determining consumer preferences and positively affect brand loyalty (Brakus et al. 2009; Kustini 2011; Ismail, Melewar, Lim, & Woodside 2011; Kumar et al. 2013; Pullman & Gross 2004; Ramaseshan & Stein 2014; Şahin et al. 2011).

Brand experiences are not just associations, but rather dynamic sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses. Like brand associations, experiences can be stored in the consumer's memory (Schmitt 2011). Brands must invest "on the affective dimension of their communications as well as of the entire brand experience in order to generate and consolidate affective bonds with their customers" (Iglesias et al. 2011, p.579). Brakus et al. (2009) argue that brands that are able to offer a superior brand experience can achieve consumer preference, differentiate themselves from other brands, build brand loyalty and even generate evangelism. In this sense, a positive and effective brand experience can promote an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand, leading to brand loyalty (Gentile et al. 2007; Morrison & Crane 2007). Based on the abovementioned statements, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1 Brand experiences influence brand loyalty.

H1a Sensory brand experiences influence brand loyalty.

H1b Affective brand experiences influence brand loyalty.

H1c Intellectual brand experiences influence brand loyalty.

H1d Behavioral brand experiences influence brand loyalty.

Despite the lack of studies that analyze the relationship between brand experiences and the perceived quality of a brand, Kumar et al. (2013) found that emotional, intellectual and behavioral dimensions affect the brand's perceived quality. Perceived quality is the consumer's subjective evaluation of the overall excellence or superiority of a product or service (Yoo & Donthu 2001). Brand experiences lead to the creation of emotional bonds between the brand and the consumer, which increases the confidence in the brand and, consequently, the brand's perceived quality (A-Qader et al. 2017; Ding & Tseng 2015; Dolbec &

Chebat 2013). In view of these assumptions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2 Brand experiences influence perceived quality.

H2a Sensory brand experiences influence perceived quality.

H2b Affective brand experiences influence perceived quality.

H2c Intellectual brand experiences influence perceived quality.

H2d Behavioral brand experiences influence perceived quality.

Companies began to use experiential marketing to create a strong bond between the brand and the consumer and, consequently, to increase brand loyalty, positive mouth-to-mouth and brand awareness (Aronne & Vasconcelos 2009). Other authors argue that brand associations are reinforced when they derive from brand experiences, existing a positive impact of experiences on brand associations (Chang & Chieng 2006; Keller 1993). Brand associations characterize the way the consumer perceives and recalls the brand, representing anything linked in memory to the brand (Aaker 1991).

The emotional component emerges as an important aspect of the experience due to the consumer's emotional involvement and to the establishment of deep and meaningful relationships with brands (Havlena & Holbrook 1986; Schmitt 1999; Thomson et al. 2005). Therefore, several authors emphasize that emotional experiences positively influence not only brand awareness but also brand associations (A-Qader et al. 2017; Cleff et al. 2014; Kumar et al. 2013). In addition, sensory and intellectual experiences also show a positive impact on both brand awareness and brand associations (Chang & Chieng 2006; Kumar et al. 2013; Cleff et al. 2014). In accordance with these arguments, the following hypotheses are considered:

H3 Brand experiences influence brand awareness and brand associations.

H3a Sensory brand experiences influence brand awareness and brand associations.

H3b Affective brand experiences influence brand awareness and brand associations.

H3c Intellectual brand experiences influence brand awareness and brand associations.



H3d Behavioral brand experiences influence brand awareness and brand associations.

Havlena and Holbrook (1986) identify gender as a fundamental variable that moderates the consumer's evaluative judgments. From this perspective, Darley and Smith (1995) verified that while men process information more logically and objectively women are more subjective and intuitive. Similarly, men characterize products and services more in terms of their physical attributes, while women use more evaluative concepts (Poole 1977), plan less their purchases, seek for less information about products and services at their acquisition and save less than men (Zeithaml 1985). Srivastava (2008) also observed that the emotional impact of experiences is stronger for women than for men.

On the other hand, purchasing behaviors also differ between genders (Das 2014). When compared to men, women are more visually oriented, more involved in the purchasing process and impulsive in their buying decisions (Havlena & Holbrook 1986; Slama & Tashchian 1985; Tifferet & Herstein 2012). Additionally, Melnyk and Osselaer (2012) show that women are more sensitive to a personalized treatment and men prefer psychological rewards that emphasize their higher status. While women attached more importance to the service quality men give more emphasis to the tangible product or service quality (Mittal & Kamakura 2001). Moreover, other studies show that women present higher levels of brand loyalty than men (Ndubisi 2006; Tifferet & Herstein 2012). Women are more relationship-oriented and pay highly attention to details, while men are more oriented toward the fulfillment of tasks or objectives and less concentrated on the details (Karatepe, Yavas, Babakus & Avci 2006; Karatepe 2011). Considering gender-related differences and the three hypotheses previously defined (H1, H2 and H3), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4 Consumer gender moderates the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity.

The development of the hypotheses and the conceptual research model (Fig. 1) was based on the brand experience model of Brakus et al. (2009), which distinguishes four experience dimensions—sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral (independent variables) and in the consumer-based brand equity model of Yoo and Donthu (2001), which distinguishes three dimensions—brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand awareness/brand associations (dependent variables). The research intends to analyze the influence that brand experiences have on consumer-based brand equity. In addition, a moderating variable—gender—was included in order to assess whether there are differences between the perceptions that female and male consumers have of brand experiences and, consequently, of the value that the brand represents for themselves.

Methodology

Considering that each consumer reacts to brand-related stimuli's in an individual and unique way and according to previous studies conducted in the brand experience context (e.g., Brakus et al. 2009; Chang & Chieng 2006; Zaran tonello & Schmitt 2010), the analysis unit in this study is the individual consumer. Additionally, Leuthesser, Kohli and Harich (1995) emphasize the analysis of brands that are sufficiently well known to the consumer. From this context, the research focuses on Nespresso, as it represents a good example of a brand that redefined the concept of value for the client (Matzler, Bailom, Eichen & Kohler 2013) upgrading a simple product—coffee—into a lifestyle product and transforming the process of drinking coffee into an experience (Brem, Maier & Wimschneider 2016).

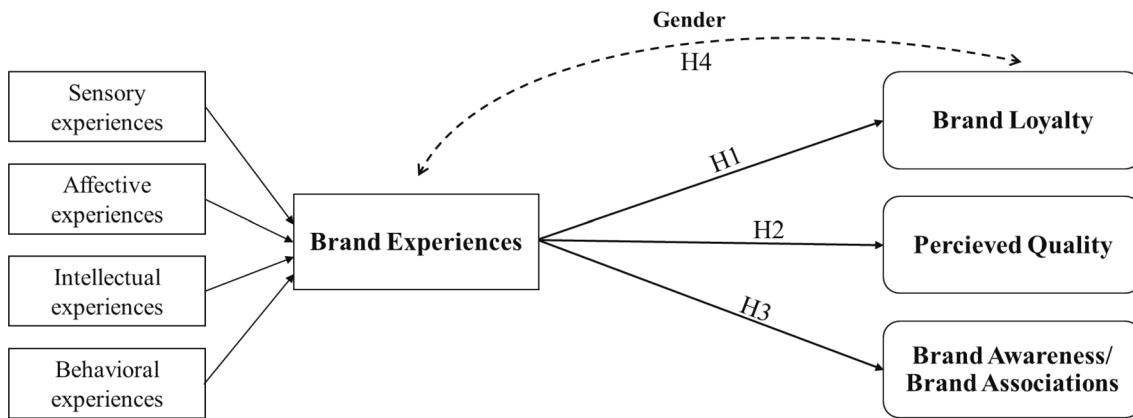


Fig. 1 Conceptual research model



For data collection, it was created an online survey that was shared through email and social networks. The study was conducted in Lisbon, Portugal, between May and June of 2019.

Sample

A population is the set of all the elements that share at least one common characteristic and that compose the universe in a study (Malhotra 1996). Based on this definition, the population of this research represents all the individuals who have already consumed Nespresso. Besides this, a sample is the population subgroup that is chosen to participate in the study and to ensure the results quality the sample should be sufficiently large ($n > 30$) allowing statistical inferences. Also, the choice between a non-probabilistic or probabilistic sample, among other factors, should be based on considerations such as the research nature. In exploratory studies, as data are treated as preliminary it is not justified the use of a probabilistic sampling (Malhotra 1996). Thus, as in most cases it is impossible to inquire the total population considering the limitations of accessibility and resources, this research used a non-probabilistic sample, where the participants were chosen using a convenience sampling method, which developed into snowball sampling (Goodman 1961).

The online survey shared through email and social networks obtained a total of 333 replies. Considering the research objectives, it was necessary that the participants had already consumed Nespresso products and for this reason it was added one filter question to eliminate irrelevant participants. As a result, only 317 of the 333 surveys were considered valid.

Approximately, 65% of the participants were female and 35% were male. Most participants were between 30 and 65 years (62%), about 22% were below 30 years and 16% were above 65 years. Approximately, 61% of the participants held a bachelor's degree, 23% held a master's degree, 7% held a doctoral degree, 3% had secondary school, 1% had primary school and 5% had other degrees. Also, about 47%

of the participant's monthly income is between 1,000 € and 2,000 €, 39% had a monthly income lesser than 1000 €, 6% had a monthly income between 2000 € and 3500 €, 3% had a monthly income higher than 3500€ and 5% were still dependent on others. In terms of the participant's occupation, the majority were employed (73%), 7% were student worker, 6% were self-employed, 6% were non-employed and 4% were retired.

Measures and survey structure

To measure brand experience was used a multidimensional 12-item scale (Table 1) from Brakus et al. (2009), that consisted of four dimensions—sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral—considered as the independent variables. To measure consumer-based brand equity was used a multidimensional 10-item scale (Table 1) from Yoo and Donthu (2001), that consisted of three dimensions—brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand awareness/brand associations—considered as the dependent variables. In brand loyalty dimension was added an item from Kumar et al. (2013), in perceived quality dimension was added an item from Yoo et al. (2000) and another from Dagger, Sweeney and Johnson (2007) and a last item was considered for brand associations from Kumar et al. (2013) for being considered as appropriate to the investigation context (Table 1).

Both Brakus et al. (2009) and Yoo and Donthu (2001) scales were empirically validated in several studies and used by several authors (e.g., Bašer et al. 2015; Ding & Tseng 2015; Iglesias et al. 2011; Moreira et al. 2017; Şahin et al. 2011; Shamim & Butt 2013; Ramaseshan & Stein 2014; Washburn & Plank 2002; Zarantonello & Schmitt 2010). The items from both scales were translated to Portuguese for the survey and some were adapted to the brand's context. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5). The items were presented in a non-sequential way to reduce the tendency to attribute similar answers.

Table 1 Characterization of the items measuring the study variables

Variables	Authors	Nº of Items
Sensory experiences	3 items from Brakus et al. (2009)	3
Affective experiences	3 items from Brakus et al. (2009)	3
Intellectual experiences	3 items from Brakus et al. (2009)	3
Behavioral experiences	3 items from Brakus et al. (2009)	3
Brand loyalty	3 items from Yoo and Donthu (2001) and 1 item from Kumar et al. (2013)	4
Perceived quality	2 items from Yoo and Donthu (2001), 1 item from Yoo et al. (2000) and 1 item from Dagger et al. (2007)	4
Brand awareness	2 items from Yoo and Donthu (2001)	2
Brand associations	3 items from Yoo and Donthu (2001) and 1 item from Kumar et al. (2013)	4



The survey was divided into three sections. The first section included five demographic questions (age, gender, education, occupation and monthly income) and one filter question to eliminate irrelevant participants. The second section, namely "The Nespresso's Experience," contained 12 questions about brand experience where the respondents were asked about their sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual brand experiences ("Appendix 1"). The third and last section, namely "The Nespresso's Brand," contained 14 questions about the customer-based brand equity, where the respondents were asked about their brand loyalty, the perceived quality they have about the brand and their brand awareness and brand associations ("Appendix 1"). The survey was also submitted to a pre-test carried out with a convenience sample of 15 consumers, to ensure the clarity and comprehension of the used terms and detect possible errors.

Results and discussion

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of the studied variables. To test the hypothesis and conceptual model, we applied partial least squares (PLS) using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker 2015). The statistical analysis followed a two-stage approach. The first step consisted of the assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The second step consists of the evaluation of the structural model.

Table 3 shows the results of the assessment of the reliability and validity of the individual indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity, following the recommendations of Hair,

Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2017). The standardized factor loadings of all items were above 0.6 (minimum of 0.691; all significant at $p < 0.001$), providing evidence of individual indicator reliability (Hair et al. 2017). Internal consistency reliability was confirmed because for all constructs Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability (CR) values surpass the cutoff of 0.7. An exception was found for behavioral experience which alpha and CR were inferior to 0.7 (Hair et al. 2017).

Convergent validity was checked in two steps. First, all constructs show CR values superior to 0.7. Second, the average variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi 1988). An exception was found for behavioral experience which AVE was inferior to 0.5, as such this variable was excluded from the model. In relation to the discriminant validity we also followed two steps. The first step was based on the Fornell and Larcker criterion, based on the square root of AVE that should be superior to the correlations between the constructs (Fornell & Larcker 1981). All constructs fulfilled this topic. The second step consisted of heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) indicator (Hair et al. 2017; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt 2015). All HTMT values were inferior 0.85 (Hair et al. 2017; Henseler et al. 2015), confirming discriminant validity.

To test the structural model, we first assessed the collinearity of the model (Hair et al. 2017). As such, the VIF values ranged from 1.00 to 2.99, which is inferior to 5, the cutoff limit suggested by Hair et al. (2017), thus, no collinearity problems were found. Then, we tested the coefficient of determination R^2 for the three endogenous variables of loyalty, perceived quality and awareness and association are 36.0, 44.5 and 33.0%, respectively, which are superior

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for each variable

	S_Exp	A_Exp	I_Exp	BL	PQ	B. Aw/B. Ass
Mean	4.04	3.7	3.26	3.74	4.23	4.31
Std. Dev	0.666	0.62	0.572	0.959	0.619	0.519

S_Exp, sensory experience; *A_Exp*, affective experience; *I_Exp*, intellectual experience; *B_Exp*, behavioral experience; *BL*, brand loyalty; *PQ*, perceived quality; *B. Aw/B. Ass*, brand awareness/brand associations.

Table 3 Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations and discriminant validity checks

Latent variables	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Affective experience	0.799	0.834	0.627	0.792	0.274	0.427	0.429	0.570	0.726
(2) Sensorial experience	0.837	0.854	0.662	0.471	0.813	0.735	0.623	0.190	0.183
(3) Intellectual experience	0.911	0.771	0.631	0.351	0.284	0.794	0.425	0.604	0.542
(4) Loyalty	0.768	0.953	0.835	0.556	0.592	0.167	0.913	0.399	0.368
(5) Perceived quality	0.866	0.928	0.762	0.579	0.658	0.313	0.721	0.873	0.794
(6) Awareness_association	0.823	0.891	0.576	0.720	0.566	0.434	0.543	0.646	0.759

α , Cronbach Alpha; CR, Composite reliability; AVE, Average variance extracted. Bolded numbers are the square roots of AVE; Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT ratios.



to 10% (Falk & Miller 1992). The Q^2 values of the endogenous variables (loyalty: 0.278; perceived quality: 0.316; awareness and association: 0.174) were above zero, indicating the predictive relevance of the conceptual model.

Table 4 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping procedure to test the parameter estimates (5000 subsamples) showing that affective experience has a positive significant effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.354$, $t = 5.131$, $p < 0.001$) and on perceived quality ($\beta = 0.237$, $t = 4.407$, $p < 0.001$). However, no significant relationship was found with awareness/associations ($\beta = 0.237$, $p > 0.001$). These results partially support H1. Furthermore, no significant relationship was identified between intellectual experience and awareness/associations ($\beta = 0.045$, $p > 0.001$) and perceived quality ($\beta = 0.031$, $p > 0.001$). A negative significant relationship was found between intellectual experience and brand loyalty ($\beta = -0.098$, $p < 0.01$). These results do not support H2. Sensorial experience has a positive significant effect on perceived quality ($\beta = 0.464$, $t = 7.586$, $p < 0.001$), awareness/associations ($\beta = 0.460$, $t = 6.307$, $p < 0.001$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.332$, $t = 4.249$, $p < 0.001$). These results provide support for H3. To test H4, we tested the gender moderating effect. However, no significant effect was found, thus H4 is rejected.

A multigroup SEM-PLS analysis was conducted to control the brand-specific effect regarding the participants' behavior in relation to the brand. Specifically, we compared the structure of brand experiences process between the participants showing a negative or neutral behavior and those evidencing a positive behavior.

The path analyses are shown in Figs. 2 and 3. Both figures highlight some differences. Sensorial experience shows a stronger relationship with the several dimensions of brand equity in the participants evidencing a positive behavior.

The opposite results were found in the relation between intellectual experience and the brand equity dimensions, meaning that the relationships were stronger when participants evidence a negative or neutral behavior. The variable affective experience showed less variability between both

groups. To compare the differences, a bootstrapping was conducted and is presented in Table 5.

Most of the paths differences are not significant. The exception is on the relationships between intellectual experience and brand awareness and association, between intellectual experience and brand loyalty and between intellectual experience and between brands perceived quality. This result is interesting and constitutes an important finding because it highlights that a more rational experience with the brand triggers a valorization of the brand equity. When it comes to more emotional or affective experiences, the perception of brand value is not affected by consumer behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical results, this study contributes to the brand experience literature and to the consumer-based brand equity literature by showing empirical evidence that brand experiences influence consumer-based brand equity. Overall, sensory experiences were by far the dimension with highest impact on all the constructs. The results indicated a positive significant influence of this dimension on perceived quality, brand awareness/brand associations and brand loyalty, showing that the creation of experiences that stimulate the consumers senses plays a central role in the increase in consumer-based brand equity.

Although affective experiences had a lower impact comparing to sensory experiences, it still showed a noteworthy positive influence on brand loyalty and perceived quality. However, there was no significant relationship between emotional experiences and brand awareness/associations.

Regarding intellectual experiences, the results showed a slight influence on brand awareness/associations and perceived quality, although not enough to consider that the variable has some influence on both dimensions and showed a negative influence of intellectual experiences on brand loyalty. Given that intellectual experiences aim to appeal to the consumer intellect and creativity, the weak influence of this dimension may be due to the fact that coffee consumption

Table 4 Structural model assessment

Path	Path coefficient	Standard errors	t statistics	p values
Affective experience > Awareness_association	0.127	0.073	1.762	0.078
Affective experience > Loyalty	0.354	0.068	5.131	0.000
Affective experience > Perceived quality	0.237	0.053	4.407	0.000
Intellectual experience > Awareness_association	0.045	0.047	0.870	0.384
Intellectual experience > Loyalty	-0.098	0.048	2.130	0.033
Intellectual experience > Perceived quality	0.031	0.046	0.633	0.527
Sensorial experience > Awareness_association	0.460	0.072	6.307	0.000
Sensorial experience > Loyalty	0.332	0.079	4.249	0.000
Sensorial experience > Perceived quality	0.464	0.061	7.586	0.000



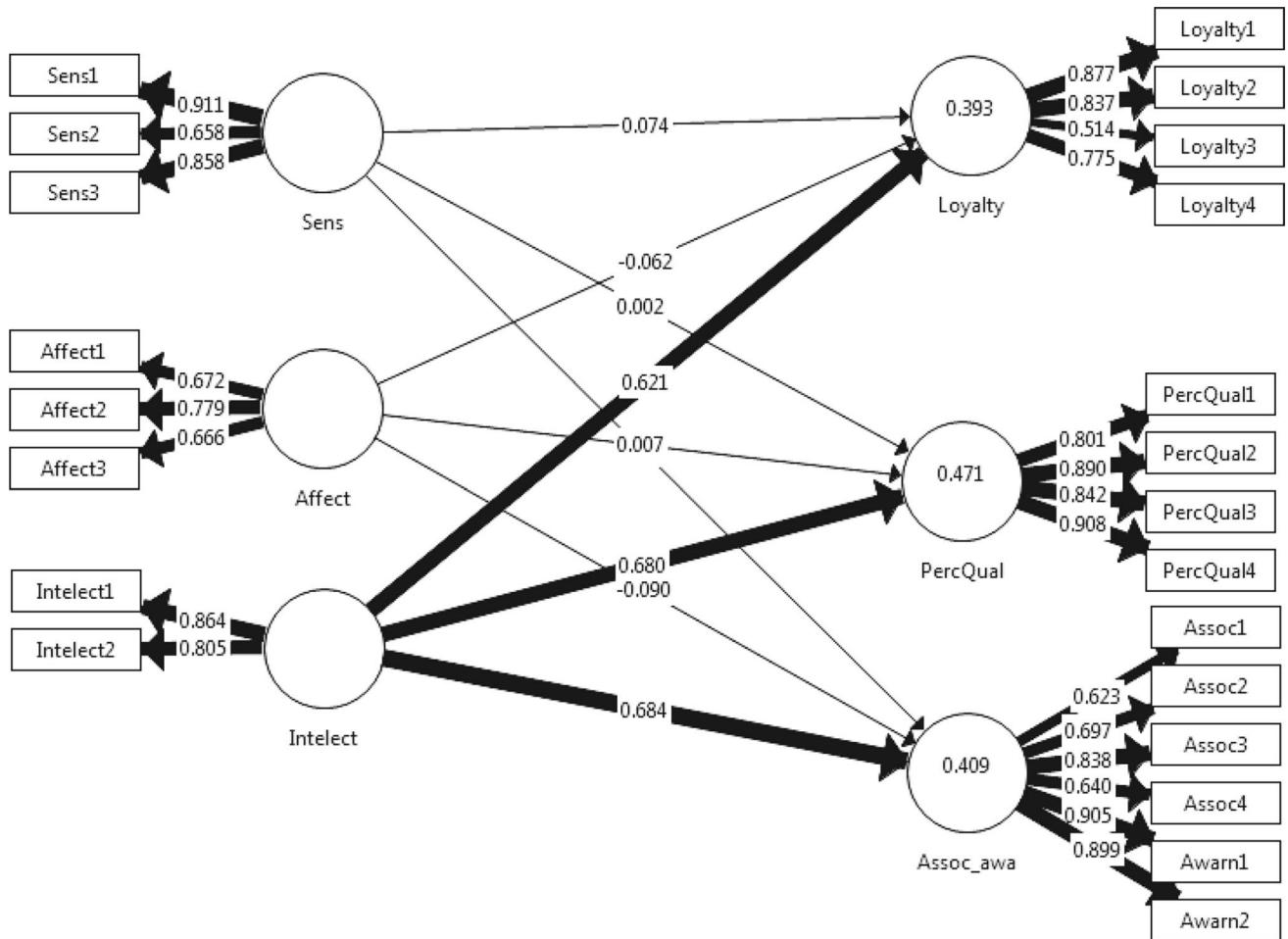


Fig. 2 Structural model for participants showing a negative or neutral behavior

is more associated with a sensory indulgence that results more in an emotional benefit rather than a functional benefit.

The impact of intellectual brand experiences couldn't be confirmed due to the lower internal reliability and validity of the items used to measure the dimension. However, the lack of relationship between behavioral experiences and consumer-based brand equity dimensions can be explained by the product category chosen for the study, since coffee consumption is not properly related to the stimulus of physical actions and behaviors, believing that for other product categories (e.g., sports brands) this dimension would have a strong influence.

Interestingly, in relation to the results obtained about the differences of female and male perceptions, the data show that the differences found were not significant enough to consider gender as a moderating variable in the relation between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity. These results are rather unexpected, as there are several studies that show differences between genders, in relation to several psychological and cognitive aspects (e.g., Mittal & Kamakura

2001). These results can be explained by Nespresso's solid image to its consumers and by the specificity of the product category analyzed, as coffee consumption is generally appreciated in the same way by both women and men.

Despite the results obtained on the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity, it was found that consumers have a very high perception of Nespresso's quality and that brand awareness and brand associations are also very strong. Regarding brand loyalty, the results are slightly lower, as the survey included a question about the preference for buying Nespresso brand coffee based on its price, which showed that although consumers prefer the Nespresso brand, they often do not buy it for its high price.

Overall, the study confirms a positive influence of sensory and affective brand experiences on consumer-based brand equity, although they present different levels of influence. Regarding intellectual and behavioral experiences, the study showed that these brand experience dimensions do not have an influence on consumer-based



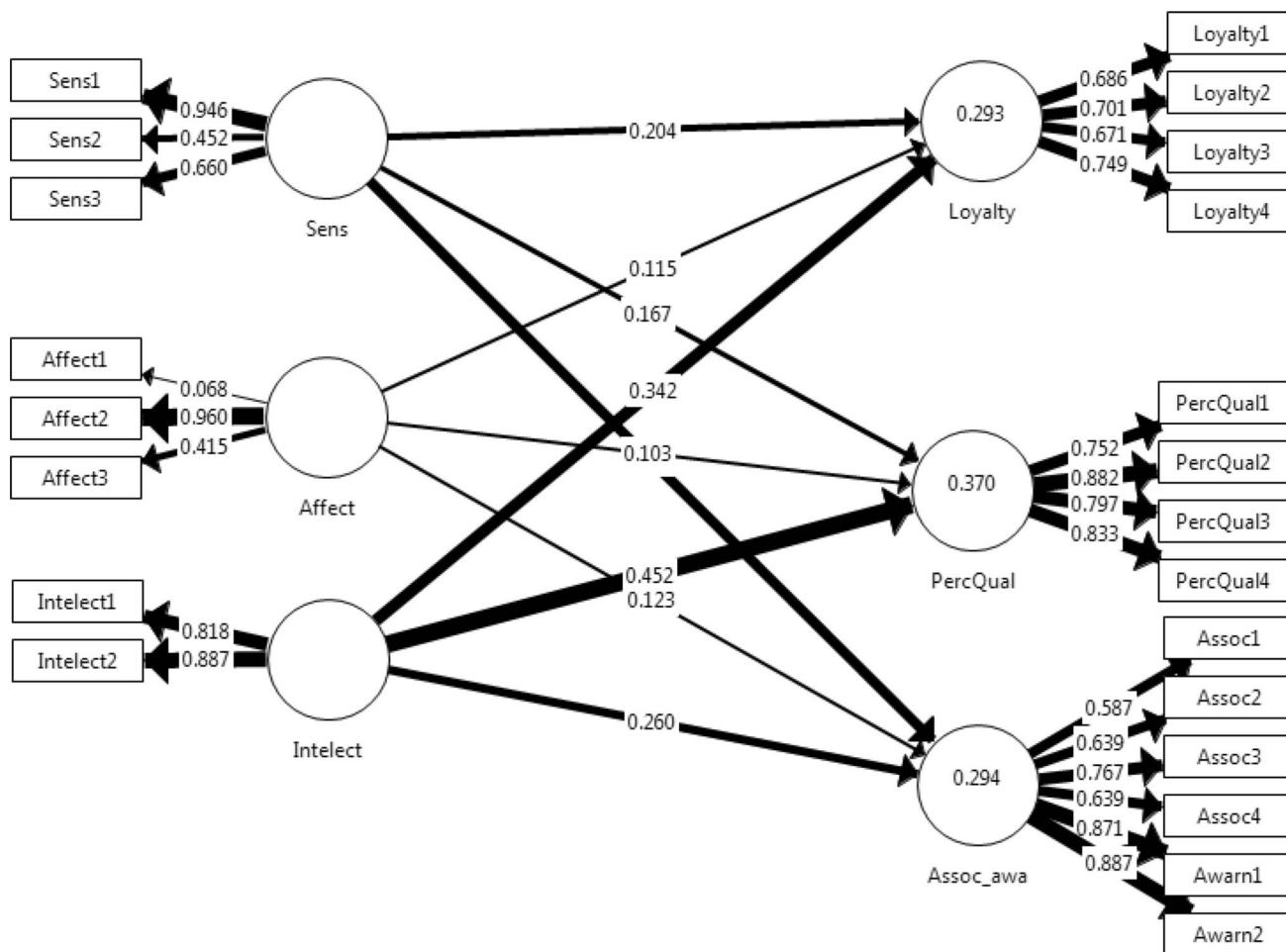


Fig. 3 Structural model for participants showing a positive behavior

Table 5 Multigroup comparisons of path coefficients

Path	Path coefficient	p values
Affective experience > Awareness_association	0.212	0.941
Affective experience > Loyalty	0.177	0.920
Affective experience > Perceived quality	0.096	0.775
Intellectual experience > Awareness_association	0.424	0.001
Intellectual experience > Loyalty	0.279	0.022
Intellectual experience > Perceived quality	0.228	0.030
Sensorial experience > Awareness_association	0.264	0.982
Sensorial experience > Loyalty	0.130	0.850
Sensorial experience > Perceived quality	0.164	0.924

brand equity, which has not proved to be a surprise since coffee consumption is not expected to awaken cognitive stimulation or physical/behavioral experiences. Thus, for brands to increase their value in the consumers' minds they must develop their sensory and emotional experiences, as they contribute significantly and positively to the consumer perceptions of the brand.

Nespresso succeeds for the unique and distinctive image they have created around the brand and by creating sensory stimulation that induces positive emotions and, consequently, that also affect positively their brand image. The fact that in this study the intellectual and behavioral experiences play a minor role is due to the lower importance that these dimensions have for coffee consumption, assuming



that for more functional products or services (e.g., electronic devices, cars, education) these dimensions would represent a higher influence on the consumer-based brand equity.

Practical implications

From a managerial point of view, the empirical results also contribute to a set of strategic implications for brands from the studied sector. Given the central role that sensory and affective experiences play in creating brand equity, companies should invest in strategies that stimulate the senses and positive emotions as they have a strong and positive influence in the consumers perceptions of the brand and, consequently, of the brand equity. The results obtained also show that for this product category, there are some brand experience dimensions (intellectual and behavioral experiences) that do not have any influence on consumer-based brand equity and, for that reason, it is also suggested that instead of brands try to stimulate all the brand experience dimensions, they should focus on the dimensions that consumers valued the most and apply them into their experiences to reinforce the relationship between the consumer and the brand, leading to the improvement of brand image, the development of strong and positive brand associations and a higher perception of their quality.

The empirical findings support the assumption that a coherent multisensory marketing strategy has enormous potential to induce a memorable brand experience that further creates a higher consumer-based brand equity and also helps building a positive relationship between the customer and the brand to positively differentiate themselves from the competitors and improve the consumer loyalty to the brand. Regarding this, the combination of sensory consistency with sensory variety provides an ideal approach to create unique and pleasurable consumer experiences.

It is known that human brain frequently finds that the senses, like smell and taste, change the way that consumers remember specific experiences (Darley and Smith 1995; Schmitt, et al. 2015). In the coffee consumption context, as the sense of smell is directly linked to the limbic system (memory system), we suggest companies to use the unique, memorable, fresh and consistent coffee aroma, that is characteristic from Nespresso, in all the stores, to convey a sense of familiarity and comfort, which provides a higher perception of quality and reinforces the brand in the consumers mind. In addition, the harmonization of the brand colors into the employers' uniform and in the interior design of all stores, strengthens the brand image and therefore helps to create a solid and consistent brand image which consumers can easily identify. Also, the possibility of being able to drink a coffee every time you visit the store turns a simple coffee purchase into a coffee experience and a moment of pleasure, reinforcing the quality of the brand and its uniqueness.

These examples could improve a more consistent and unique experience for the consumers and, consequently, a higher consumer-based brand equity.

However, the above implications are specific to the product category analyzed in the present study. Nevertheless, strategic implications can be verified in a broader context. The results suggest that for brands to increase their brand equity in the consumers' mind, they should analyze which brand dimensions have higher influence in consumers and create experiences focused on those dimensions, as there are always some brand dimensions that reveal higher influence on the consumer depending on the category in which the product or service is inserted. Thus, to establish long-term relationships with consumers, companies must understand the brand experience dimensions that have higher influence on their consumers and develop strategies focused on these dimensions, leading to a higher consumer satisfaction and loyalty to the brand. In addition, regarding the differences observed between the perceptions that female and male consumers have of brand experiences and, consequently, of brand equity, it is recommended for companies that are more oriented to a specific gender to understand the differences that exist between the importance that the different brand experiences have on both genders, to adjust their strategies in a more precise and efficient way.

Limitations and future research

Notwithstanding its theoretical contributions and managerial implications, this article also presents some limitations that provide guidance for future research. Firstly, the findings are limited to Nespresso and to a specific product category, as such, researchers should be cautious about extrapolating the results across other brands or different geographic or cultural contexts. Secondly, the study was based on Brakus et al. (2009) and Yoo and Donthu (2001) models to predict the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity. Future research should, in one hand, analyze the stability of the relationship between the two proposed models and, in another, analyze the two concepts using other models. Thirdly, besides the study sample for convenience, its size is also not large enough to estimate representative results of the population. Future research should use a larger sample that leads to a broader generalization of the results. Fourthly, although the survey included some demographic questions (gender, age, monthly income, education and occupation) of the inquired, only one was included as a demographic moderator variable—gender—in the data analysis, which proved not to have an impact on the relationship between brand experiences and consumer-based brand equity. For this reason, future studies should consider the moderation effects of other demographic variables (e.g., age, income, education), as the results would almost certainly



be different and there would probably be more interesting differences to analyze.

Appendix 1: Survey items

Measured variables	Items	Cronbach's α
Sensory experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nespresso makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses ■ Nespresso is interesting in a sensory way ■ Nespresso does not appeal to my senses*² 	0.837
Affective experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nespresso induces feelings and emotions ■ I do not have strong feelings for Nespresso*² ■ Nespresso is an emotional brand 	0.799
Behavioral experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I consume Nespresso ■ Nespresso results in bodily experiences ■ Nespresso is not action oriented *² 	0.901
Intellectual experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter ■ Nespresso does not make me think *² ■ Nespresso stimulates my curiosity 	0.911
Brand loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I consider myself to be loyal to Nespresso ■ Nespresso is my first choice of coffee brand ■ I will not buy other brands if Nespresso is available ■ If anyone asks me which coffee brand to choose, I will recommend Nespresso 	0.768
Perceived quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The likely quality of Nespresso is extremely high ■ Nespresso's functionality is very high ■ Nespresso's reliability is very high ■ The overall quality of the service provided by Nespresso is excellent 	0.866

Measured variables	Items	Cronbach's α
Brand awareness/Brand associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I can recognize Nespresso among other competing brands ■ I am familiar with Nespresso ■ I can easily remember some Nespresso's characteristics ■ I can quickly recall the Nespresso's symbol or logo ■ I have difficulty in imagining Nespresso in my mind*² ■ Nespresso has a unique image in my mind when compared to other competing brands 	0.823

*²reverse coded.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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