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Drivers and outcomes of perceived brand authenticity and customer engagement in the hospitality context.

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PhD in Management, specialization in Marketing

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Quero dedicar esta tese ao meu marido e aos meus filhos. Ao meu marido, pelo apoio permanente e incondicional. Aos meus filhos que, sem se aperceberem, me dão a força, a motivação e a alegria necessárias para viver uma vida com propósito, independentemente dos desafios.

"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

Isaac Newton

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Resumo

Esta tese pretende ter uma visão holística de como a experiência com a marca, o compromisso do cliente e a autenticidade da marca são percecionados pelos clientes (hóspedes) e pelos gestores e de como se relacionam, num contexto de hotelaria (hotéis *upscale*). Sete questões de investigação são identificadas.

O trabalho engloba duas revisões sistemáticas de literatura, sobre o compromisso do cliente e autenticidade da marca (Estudos um e dois), que organizam o conhecimento existente e apresentam possíveis linhas de investigação futura. Os outros estudos aplicam uma metodologia mista- quantitativa (Estudo quatro) e qualitativa (Estudos três e cinco), permitindo a triangulação dos dados.

Os Estudos três e cinco captam a perspetiva dos clientes e dos gestores sobre os temas, respetivamente, identificam os estímulos associados à experiência de marca e à autenticidade e revelam as opiniões sobre o impacto da pandemia COVID-19 nos constructos em análise.

A partir do Estudo quatro, conclui-se que uma experiência positiva com a marca de hotel influencia a perceção de autenticidade relativamente ao hotel, assim como o compromisso do cliente com o hotel. Quanto maior a perceção de autenticidade, maior tende a ser o compromisso dos clientes em relação ao hotel. Um hóspede que perceciona um hotel como autêntico, tende a recomendar e a voltar ao hotel e a sentir um orgulho autêntico. Um hóspede que está comprometido com o hotel, tende também a recomendar e voltar e a sentir um orgulho autêntico.

Por fim, são apresentadas contribuições para a teoria e para a prática.

Palavras-chave: Experiência com a marca, Compromisso do cliente, Autenticidade da marca, Hotelaria.

Código JEL: M31 (Marketing).

Abstract

The main goal of this thesis is to have a holistic understanding of how brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity are perceived by customers and hospitality managers, and how they relate with each other, in the hospitality setting (upscale hotels). This work answers to seven research questions.

This thesis includes five studies. Two systematic literature reviews about customer engagement and brand authenticity (Study one and Study two) map the existing knowledge about the topics and highlight avenues for future research. The other three studies capture the perspectives of customers and managers, using a mixed method approach- quantitative methodology (Study four) and qualitative methodologies (Study three and Study five), enabling data triangulation.

Study three and Study five, capture managers´ and customers´ perspectives on the topics, respectively, also identifying the main stimuli to convey customer experience and authenticity perceptions and giving insights about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the sector and on the analyzed constructs.

Findings from Study four reveal that a positive experience with the hotel brand influences the customers´ perception of authenticity about the hotel, and their engagement with the hotel. The more authentic the hotel is perceived, the more engaged the customers tend to be. Moreover, a customer who perceives an upscale hotel as authentic, tends to recommend and return and feel authentic pride. Finally, an engaged customer is also more likely to recommend and return to the hotel and feel authentic pride.

Contributions to theory and practice are also presented.

Keywords: Brand experience, Customer engagement, Brand authenticity, Hospitality.

JEL code: M31 (Marketing).

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Glossary

CB-SEM- Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling

F&B- Food and Beverages

JCR- Journal Citation Reports

PLS- Partial Least Squares

SEM-Structural Equation Modeling

SJR- Scimago Journal & Country Rank

STR- Smith Travel Research

UNWTO- United Nations World Tourism Organization

WOM- Word of Mouth

WoS- Web Of Science

1. Introduction

The main motivation for this thesis is the interest in increasing the scientific knowledge concerning three key marketing constructs- brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity- in the hospitality field, more specifically, in upscale hotels. The main scientific goal is to have a holistic understanding of how these concepts are perceived and how they relate with each other, in this specific setting and in the present context. The thesis captures the perspective of both customers and hospitality managers, using a mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative methodologies). The mixed approach enables a deeper and integrated view of the phenomena, addressing identified research gaps.

This introductory chapter contextualizes the relevance of the research topic for Academia and for managers, identifies the knowledge gaps to be addressed and describes the research field. It also explains the main theoretical foundations of the study and the research questions that we aim to answer. The research philosophy and the research design of the study are also described. Finally, the thesis structure is presented.

1.1 Research relevance

1.1.1 Relevance of customer experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement

In light of increasing competition and in a context where different market offerings proliferate, it has become a challenge for companies to differentiate from competitors. In fact, creating unique and memorable experiences has been a vehicle to ensure differentiation, especially in the service sector (Walls, 2013). As explained by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), creating a strong customer experience is one of the top priorities of managers. The importance of the topic, together with the increasing complexity of customer experiences in modern times- resulting from customers interacting with firms through different touchpoints and channels, along the customer journey- have turned this construct into a very important research challenge in the marketing field, for the next years (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the tourism and hospitality setting, the relevance of the topic has also been recognized by scholars (e.g., Loureiro et al., 2020; Manthiou et al., 2016). Schmitt (1999), together with Pine and Gilmore (1998), were some of the first scholars to address the topic. The "Experience Economy", introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998), raises the attention to the importance of experiences, recognizing them as a new economic offering, different from goods and services. In fact, it is recognized that "goods

and services are no longer enough; what consumers want today are experiences" (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 1). Euromonitor International identifies "Experience More" as one of the 2019 megatrends (long term consumer changes in attitudes and behaviors that have a global impact), stating that the emotion of "experiencing something" has gained importance and is beginning to overcome the traditional buying cycle, especially due to the millennial generation (Euromonitor International, 2019).

In the literature, several definitions of customer experience are presented. Yet, in general, scholars and practitioners tend to describe it as a multidimensional construct, with different components. For example, it is described as "the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company" (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p. 118) or as a "…a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 71). When an experience is related to a specific aspect of the offering, namely, the brand, the concept of brand experience emerges. This is why brand experience is defined as "…subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53).

Despite the recognized relevance of the topic, there is a gap between the conceptual notion of consumer experience and the lack of empirical evidence, especially in the hotel industry (Walls, 2013). Moreover, academics continue to call for more research to understand the relationship between experience and other key marketing concepts (Brodie et al., 2011; Hepola et al., 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Although scholars have analyzed- in different settings-the outcomes of customer experience/ brand experience, namely, the impact of experience on loyalty (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Brun et al., 2017), Lemon and Verhoef (2016) recognize the need to have a deeper understanding about the outcomes of customer experience. Specifically, the long-term loyalty effects of the customer journey, as well as the immediate purchase consequences.

According to Gilmore and Pine (2007), consumers not only look for memorable experiences, but they also "choose to buy or not to buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be" (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 1), acknowledging the importance of the authenticity concept. In contemporary society and, in particular, in consumers´ lives, the quest for authenticity has been growing (Fine, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004) and, in the marketing field, consumers´ quest for authenticity is considered "one of the cornerstones of contemporary

marketing" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 21). Research on authenticity has been very fragmented, leading to different definitions of the concept (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). However, some common ground can be found in the literature as it is many times associated with being genuine, real and/or true (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). When the concept is applied to objects like brands, the concept of brand authenticity emerges (Fritz et al., 2017) and different definitions of the concept are presented. For example, Fritz et al. (2017) consider that "in summary, brand authenticity can be defined as the perceived consistency of a brand's behavior that reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining its brand essence or substantive nature, whereby the perceptual process involves two types of authenticity (i.e., indexical and iconic authenticity)" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 327). Akbar and Wymer (2017) define brand authenticity as "the extent to which a brand is considered unique, legitimate, truthful to its claims, and lacking falsity" (Akbar & Wymer, 2017, p. 14). The relevance of the topic associated with the fragment research around it, has made scholars to call for deeper research on authenticity/ brand authenticity in different segments or industries (e.g., Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Napoli et al., 2016; Spiggle et al., 2012) and, specifically, in the hospitality sector (e.g., Manthiou et al., 2018; Mody et al., 2019). The need to study authenticity in the hotel setting is recognized by Manthiou et al. (2018) who consider that "even though authenticity has not been ignored in the hospitality and tourism research, it is still understudied in the hotel sector" (Manthiou et al., 2018, p. 39).

Other avenues for future research are also recognized, for instance, concerning the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017). In fact, scholars suggest deeper research to understand the relationship between authenticity and other related constructs (Morhart et al., 2015; Moulard et al., 2016), namely, between brand experience and brand authenticity (e.g., Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2021) and between authenticity and customer engagement (e.g., Algharabat et al., 2018; Rather et al., 2019).

Concerning the topic of customer engagement, the present marketing era has emphasized the need for companies to keep their customers engaged as "the goal of organizations evolved from relationship marketing to engaging customers in all possible ways" (Pansari & Kumar, 2017, p. 294). Both managers and scholars recognize the importance of having engaged customers and, in the literature, there has been an increasing number of authors studying the topic. Several definitions can also be found. For instance, some authors define it as psychological process which drives customer loyalty (Bowden, 2009) and others as "a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/ object (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships" (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 260).

For Vivek et al. (2012), it is defined as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/ or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate" (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 127). Several studies perceive customer engagement as a multidimensional construct with cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (e.g., Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011a). In the present global and digital context, the importance of customer engagement in the online setting has grown substantially (Bilro et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2013). However, some research gaps can be identified. For instance, scholars call for more research on customer engagement and customer engagement behaviors in the hospitality industry (e.g., Romero, 2017; So et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2013). Moreover, although several studies have analyzed the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement, there is a need to further explore specific relationships. This is the case, for instance, of the relationship between experience and engagement in the tourism and hospitality context (Bilro et al., 2018; NasarAmini Jeloudarlou et al., 2021; Prentice & Nguyen, 2020) or the relationship between authenticity, engagement and loyalty (R. Chen et al., 2020; Rather et al., 2019).

To summarize, based on the identified knowledge gaps, this thesis aims to: i) increase the empirical evidence of customer experience in the hotel industry, ii) have a deeper understanding of the relationship between customer experience and other key marketing concepts, in the hospitality setting, iii) study authenticity in hotels as it is still understudied in this setting, iv) explore the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity, v) have a deeper knowledge about customer engagement and customer engagement behaviors in the hospitality industry and vi) explore specific relationships between customer engagement and other related marketing constructs.

1.1.2 Research field and present context

Based on the identified gaps, our research field is the hotel industry. From the literature, we realize that consumer experience and brand authenticity are still understudied in the hotel setting (Manthiou et al., 2018; Walls, 2013). Moreover, the relevance of brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement in the service context also underline the need to study the constructs in this setting. Indeed, in today´s market scenario, hotels are much more than just places to sleep, as guests perceive them as places to pursue experiences (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Sukhu et al., 2019). We focus on upscale hotels because, on the one hand, customers of higher priced hotels tend to be more engaged than those of lower priced hotel

brands (Choi & Kandampully, 2019) and, on the other hand, authenticity is a main dimension of luxury goods and luxury offers, in general (Manthiou et al., 2018).

Belonging to the lodging/accommodations sector, hotels are defined as accommodation establishments that are integrated in a building or in an independent part of a building, having homogeneous facilities with complete and contiguous floors, with direct accesses that are used by the customers. Hotels provide a temporary lodging service and other services (eg., meals), in return for payment. These establishments have, at least, ten lodging units (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2021). Hotel classification systems are used to provide a ranking of hotels, usually by using a nomenclature such as stars (or diamonds), with one star being associated with basic facilities and five stars to luxury in service and facilities (UNWTO, 2015). Smith Travel Research (STR), a leading market research company focused on the hospitality industry, classifies hotels on different segments, based primarily on the actual average room rates. The chain scale segments are: Luxury, Upper Upscale, Upscale, Upper Midscale, Midscale, Economy and Independent. STR has also a collapsed scale, combining chain scales that form a single segment. In this case, the segments are Upscale chains (includes luxury, Upper Upscale and Upscale chains), Midscale chains (includes Upper Midscale and Midscale chains), Economy chains and Independent hotels (STR, 2021).

In the literature, Upscale hotels are many times associated with 4 and 5-star hotels. Based on the definitions presented by Choi and Kandampully (2019) and Sun et al. (2016), in this thesis, an upscale hotel is perceived as a 4 or 5-star hotel which is characterized by a superior service and an excellent architecture, landscaping and interior design, providing gourmet dining, 24h room service, Internet access and other services.

The hospitality industry, as a whole, is composed by the businesses that offer accommodation, prepared food and beverage service and/ or entertainment (Kotler et al., 2017). The two main industries that comprise tourism are the hospitality and travel industries and the success of the hospitality industry is very dependent on the travel industry (Kotler et al., 2017).

The present context of the tourism industry is very unique as the COVID-19 pandemic situation experienced from 2020 onwards led to several lockdowns worldwide, to the introduction of travel restrictions in destinations worldwide and even to the closure of borders for international tourism in some destinations, in specific periods. All this had a tremendous impact on the global tourist activity. In 2019, in the world, international tourist arrivals were around 1.5 billion with ten consecutive years of sustained growth (UNWTO, 2021a). In 2020, there was an unprecedented fall of international tourism with a decrease of 73% in international tourist arrivals and a decrease of 64% in international tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2021b). The

market size of the hotel and resort industry worldwide peaked at 1.47 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019 and dropped to 610 billion U.S. dollars in 2020 (Statista, 2021). In 2021 the market is expected to grow, compared to the previous year, to nearly 950 billion US dollars (Statista, 2021).

The improvement in vaccination rates, the introduction of Covid-19 certificates and the ease of restrictions for international travelling are important for the recovery of tourism. However, there is still a high level of uncertainty concerning the future (European Travel Commission, 2021). In the case of Europe, the European Travel Commission states that the recovery in domestic and short-haul travel is ongoing, although long-haul demand is only expected to return to its 2019 market share by 2030 (European Travel Commission, 2021).

1.2 Research Problem

1.2.1 Foundational theories

Three main foundational theories underpin this thesis. Firstly, the service-dominant logic is a key theory, in which customer engagement is integrated. Vargo and Lusch (2004) claim that marketing has evolved from a goods-dominant approach to a service-dominant view, where intangibility and relationships are very important. The authors highlight the key role of the consumer who shifts from someone who is merely the recipient of the goods to someone who actively participates in the co-production of the service. The service is, in fact, conjointly co-created with the customer. According to Brodie et al. (2011), the service-dominant logic is one of the theorical foundations of customer engagement as this approach assumes that the consumer is a co-creator of value, the actors involved (social and economic) are resource integrators and value is determined by the beneficiary. Secondly, the inter-relationships among the constructs- namely, among customer engagement and other constructs- are based on the interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). According to this theory, the actors in a relationship tend to analyse the outcomes of a relationship, based on the rewards they can receive and the associated costs. In this case, different partners, brands, and customers, tend to maximize the rewards of the relationship and minimize the costs. Finally, the constructivist approach is the pillar underpinning the authenticity construct. This approach considers that authenticity is a quality perceived by consumers that emerge from personal views which "allows for different interpretations of reality on the basis of consumers´ projections onto objects and is essentially symbolic" (Leigh et al., 2006, p. 483). Thus, it has a subjective component, assuming that authenticity is a socially constructed concept (Cohen, 1988).

1.2.2 Research questions

This thesis intends to go further in understanding how the constructs of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity are perceived and interplay with each other in the hospitality field and, specifically, in upscale hotels. The objective is to have a holistic and deep understanding of the phenomena, integrating the perspectives of different stakeholders. Emerging from the literature review performed and the identified research gaps, this thesis aims to answer to the following research questions:

i) What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?

ii) What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?

iii) How are brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement perceived by practitioners in the hospitality context?

iv) Can brand experience be a driver of brand authenticity and customer engagement?

v) Can brand authenticity perceptions be a driver of customer engagement?

vi) Can authentic pride and behavioral intentions (brand loyalty) be outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement?

vii) How can the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity) be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation? Will they be relevant after COVID-19 pandemic situation?

1.3 Research philosophy

A research philosophy "refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130). In business and management, five major philosophies can be highlighted: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders et al., 2019). Positivism defends the application of the methods of natural sciences to the study of social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Positivism assumes that only phenomena that can be confirmed by the senses can be warranted as knowledge, the objective of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested, knowledge is originated through the gathering of facts that provide basis for laws and that science is objective (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Critical realism "focuses on explaining what we see and experience in terms of underlying structures of reality that shape the observable events" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 147).

Critical realists assume that reality is external and independent, but not directly accessible through our knowledge and observation (Saunders et al., 2019).

Interpretivism, as opposed to positivism, is built upon the idea that human beings and their social world cannot be studied in the same way as natural sciences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It underlines that "there are multiple explanations or realities to explain a phenomenon", "the research process should be subjective, rather than objective", "the use of qualitative methodology instead of a quantitative methodology", "empirical materials rather than data are collected from an insider´s perspective rather than from an outsider´s perspective" and "empirical materials rather than data are collected in their real world or natural setting as opposed to being collected under "experimental" conditions" (Jennings, 2010, p. 40). In the case of postmodernism, it highlights the role of language and power relations, questioning accepted ways of thinking and, at the same time, supporting alternative views (Saunders et al., 2019). They "reject the modern objectivist, realist ontology of things, and instead emphasize the chaotic primacy of flux, movement, fluidity and change" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 150).

Finally, pragmatism assumes that there are different ways of interpreting the world , that there may be multiple realities and that one single point of view is not able to give the entire picture (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, it is perfectly possible to work with different types of knowledge and methods as the main objective is to use the adequate method/ methods that enable credible and relevant data that, at the end, would advance research and increase knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). In the current thesis, we follow this last philosophy as our objective is to have a holistic and deep understanding of the phenomena, integrating the perspectives of different stakeholders. In this vein, for primary data, a mixed method approach is used as primary data originated in this research have a qualitative and a quantitative nature. In fact, the term mixed methods research "is used as a simple shorthand to stand for research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 628).

1.4 Research design

This research is developed based on secondary data and primary data. Concerning secondary data, two systematic literature reviews are performed (Study one and Study two), based on a systematic process. The systematic review process is a transparent, replicable and scientific process to review the existing evidence, about a certain theme (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

Systematic and clear methods are used to identify, choose and analyze the most relevant research on the topic (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

For primary data, a mixed method approach is used as the current research combines both quantitative (Study four) and qualitative methodologies (Studies three and five). Several reasons underline this methodological choice. Firstly, it is possible to achieve a deeper and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon, integrating the perspectives of different stakeholders, by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Secondly, with this methodological approach, it is easier to answer to different types of research questions, which is the case of the current research, and to study different aspects of the phenomenon Thirdly, in the concrete case of the Studies four and five a quantitative and qualitative methodology, respectively, are applied as qualitative research is used to facilitate the interpretation of the established relationships between the variables that come out from the quantitative analysis. Finally, using different research strategies enables the triangulation of the data because the results emerging from one method can be cross-checked against the results of the other method (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Jennings, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Concerning the empirical studies, Study three, using a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews, has been developed to understand the hospitality managers´ perspectives about the topics being studied and also contributes to fine tune the proposed conceptual model that is tested in Study four. Study four, using a quantitative approach based on questionnaires, captures the customers´ perspectives and analyzes the interrelation between the identified variables (brand experience, brand authenticity perceptions, customer engagement and possible outcomes), based on the defined conceptual framework. Study five, using a qualitative methodology based on Focus Groups to customers, aims to enlighten the results of Study four and to address some topics that have not been covered in Study four.

To sum up the methodology applied in this research, we would like to highlight:

i)   The systematic literature reviews about customer engagement and brand authenticity that employ a systematic process to select and analyze the articles- Study one and Study two (see chapters 3 and 4).

ii)   A qualitative approach to understand the managers´ perspective on the topics, using in-depth interviews as the tool to collect the data - Study three (see chapter 5).

iii)   A quantitative approach to understand guest´s perspectives- Study four- to test the hypotheses proposed, using a questionnaire as the instrument to collect data (see chapter 6).

iv)   A qualitative approach to better understand guests´ perspectives- Study five. In this study, Focus Groups with guests are used as the instrument to collect data (see chapter 7).

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized as follows: Introduction, Methodology, Study One- Systematic literature review customer engagement, Study Two- Systematic literature review brand authenticity, Study Three- Managers´ perspectives (based on in-depth interviews), Study Four- Customers´ perspectives (based on a survey), Study Five- Customers´ perspectives (based on Focus groups), final Conclusions and Implications.

The research questions guide this thesis and influence the methodological choices undertaken (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1- Thesis structure: Research questions, methodology, study and chapter

Research questions	Methodology	Study	Chapter in the thesis
i) What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?	Systematic Literature Review.	Study one.	Chapter three.
ii) What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?	Systematic Literature Review.	Study two.	Chapter four.
iii) How are brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement perceived by practitioners in the hospitality context?	Qualitative (in depth interviews)	Study three.	Chapter five.
iv) Can brand experience be a driver of brand authenticity and customer engagement?	Quantitative (questionnaire)*	Study four.*	Chapter six.*
v) Can brand authenticity perceptions be a driver of customer engagement?	Quantitative (questionnaire)*	Study four.*	Chapter six.*
vi) Can authentic pride and behavioral intentions (brand loyalty) be outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement?	Quantitative (questionnaire)*	Study four.*	Chapter six.*
vii) How can the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity) be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation? Will they be relevant after COVID-19 pandemic situation?	Qualitative (in-depth interviews and focus groups).	Study three and study five.	Chapter five and chapter seven.

*Although the research questions iv, v and vi are directly answered in Study four, the insights coming from Study three and Study five also contribute to answer these questions.

Source: Author´s elaboration

2. Methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the methodology applied in this research. Emerging from the literature review performed and from the research gaps identified, the research questions have been formulated. Therefore, the methodology to apply in the current research has been defined and implemented, in order to answer to the following research questions:

i)   What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?

ii)   What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?

iii)   How are brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement perceived by practitioners in the hospitality context?

iv)   Can brand experience be a driver of brand authenticity and customer engagement?

v)   Can brand authenticity perceptions be a driver of customer engagement?

vi)   Can authentic pride and behavioral intentions (brand loyalty) be outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement?

vii)   How can the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity) be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation? Will they be relevant after COVID-19 pandemic situation?

2.1 Research design

This research is developed using both primary and secondary data. Besides doing a literature review, based on secondary data, primary data have also been collected for studies three, four and five. We decided to capture the perspectives of the main stakeholders involved which, in this case, are the hospitality managers and the guests (clients), in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being analyzed. The overall design of the thesis follows a conclusive approach as the objective is to measure specific phenomena, testing hypotheses and examining relationships (Malhotra et al., 2017). This approach is mainly applied to capture the guests´ perspectives, which is clearly reflected on Study four. Study three and Study five have a more exploratory approach.

Study three, based on in-depth interviews, has been developed to understand the hospitality managers´ perspectives concerning the topics being studied and employs a more exploratory

approach as the main objectives are to provide insights and understanding of the phenomena (Kumar et al., 2019; Malhotra et al., 2017). In fact, this study, besides conveying managers´ perspectives, also contributes to fine tune the proposed conceptual model that is tested in Study four. The main objectives of Study three are i) to identify the most important dimensions of brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement in an upscale hotel, based on the managers´ point of view, ii) to understand how the main constructs (their definitions, main associations…) are perceived by practitioners, iii) to identify the stimuli that managers associate to experience and authenticity, iv) to understand the main mechanisms to establish engagement with customers in this type of hotels, v) to identify the outcomes that are important for managers in this sector and in this type of hotels, and vi) to have insights about how the global "new reality", imposed by COVID-19 pandemic could impact the sector and the relevance of the topics under study.

In Study four, the interrelation between the identified variables (brand experience, brand authenticity perceptions, customer engagement and possible outcomes) is analyzed, based on the defined conceptual framework. The tool used to collect the data in Study four is the questionnaire.

Study five, based on Focus Groups to guests, has an exploratory approach as its main objectives are to enlighten the questionnaire´s results (Malhotra et al., 2017) and to address some topics that have not been covered with the survey in Study four.

To sum up the methodology applied in this research, we would like to highlight:

i)   The systematic literature reviews about customer engagement and brand authenticity that employ a systematic process to select and analyze the articles- Study one and Study two (see chapters 3 and 4).

ii)   A qualitative approach to understand the managers´ perspective on the topics, using in-depth interviews as the tool to collect data - Study three (see chapter 5).

iii)   A quantitative approach to understand guest´s perspectives- Study four- to test the hypotheses proposed, based on the guests´ opinions. It is a cross-sectional study, and a questionnaire is used as the instrument to collect data (see chapter 6).

iv)   A qualitative approach to better understand guests´ perspectives- Study five. In this study, Focus Groups with guests are used as the instrument to collect data (see chapter 7).

In order to make clear the alignment between the research questions and the methodological tools used, we would like to highlight that the methodology applied in the literature reviews performed and in the other developed studies, was chosen based on the formulated research questions. Firstly, the literature reviews performed (Study one and Study two) address the

research questions i) "What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?" and ii) "What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?". Secondly, the in-depth interviews to hospitality managers, employed in Study three, address the research question iii) "How are brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement perceived by practitioners in the hospitality context?" and vii) "How can the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity) be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation? Will they be relevant after COVID-19 pandemic situation?". Thirdly, the quantitative methodology employed in Study four, based on a survey, helps to answer to the other research questions that address the relationships between the variables under study: iv) "Can brand experience be a driver of brand authenticity and customer engagement?", v) "Can brand authenticity perceptions be a driver of customer engagement?" and vi) "Can authentic pride and behavioral intentions (brand loyalty) be outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement? " Finally, the insights coming from the Focus Groups to guests (Study five) contribute to address the research questions iv, v, vi and vii (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1- Research design
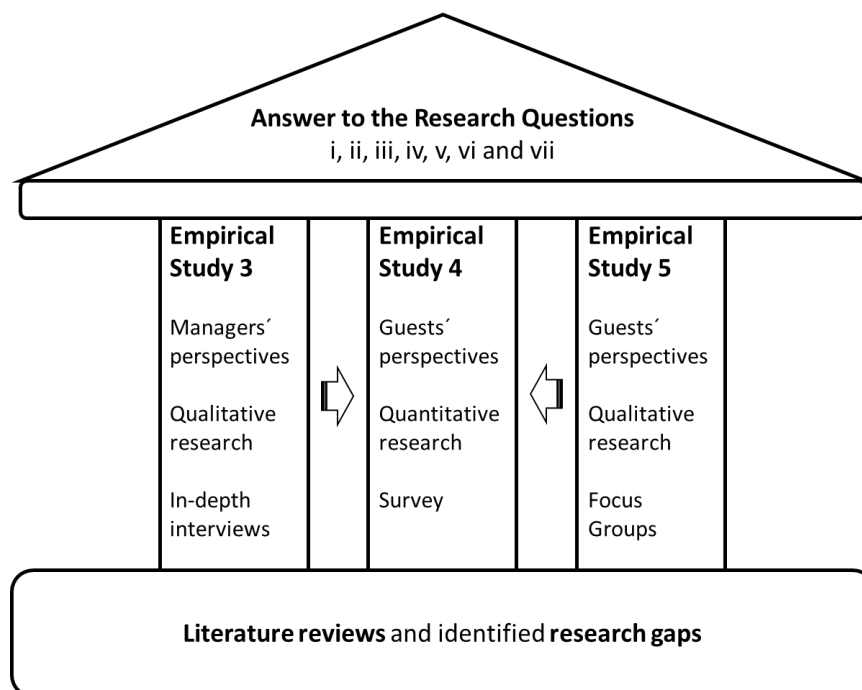
Source: Author´s elaboration

2.2 Systematic literature reviews

Study one and Study two of this thesis present two systematic literature reviews about customer engagement (Study one) and brand authenticity (Study two). The systematic review process is a review of the existing evidence, about a certain theme, and it is usually guided by a specific question (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). This methodological process is transparent, replicable and scientific because it uses systematic and clear methods to identify, choose and analyze the most relevant research on the topic (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). In systematic reviews, the search strategy to identify and select relevant studies is defined, based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Tranfield et al., 2003). The methodological procedures used for the systematic reviews included in this thesis (Study one and Study two) are deeply described in chapters 3 and 4.

2.3 Research methods: Mixed methods approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), mixed methods research has been growing in the business and management area. The "term mixed methods research is used as a simple shorthand for research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 628). As stated, primary data originated in this research have a qualitative and a quantitative nature.

Qualitative Research has been described as "an unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide depth, insight and understanding" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 150). In the case of the current research, qualitative research has been employed mainly for the following reasons: to encapsulate the behavior, feelings and experiences of participants, to analyze a complex phenomenon, to capture the holistic dimension of the situation, to develop insights that help to fine tune the conceptual model and to help to interpret and explain underlying reasons for the quantitative findings, as suggested by Malhotra et al. (2017).

Quantitative Research is described as "research techniques that seek to quantify data and, typically, apply some form of measurement and statistical analysis" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 150). It has a structured, systematic and replicable research design and enables hypothesis testing (Jennings, 2010).

The current research applies a mixed method approach as it combines both quantitative (Study four) and qualitative methodologies (Studies three and five). In fact, several reasons underline this methodological choice. Firstly, because by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, it is possible to achieve a deeper and more holistic understanding of

the phenomenon, integrating the perspectives of different stakeholders. Secondly, as highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2011), this approach enables the researchers to study different aspects of the phenomenon and answer to different types of research questions which is, in fact, the case of the current research. Thirdly, in the concrete case of the Studies four and five a quantitative and qualitative methodology, respectively, are applied as qualitative research is used to facilitate the interpretation of the established relationships between the variables that come out from the quantitative analysis. Fourthly, different research strategies enable the triangulation of the data as the results emerging from one method can be cross-checked against the results of the other method (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Jennings, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This is, in fact, the case in the current research. Triangulation is defined as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point"(Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 262).

2.4 In-depth interviews

In the current research, in-depth interviews are used in Study three as the main tool to capture managers´ perspectives about the topics being studied. An in-depth interview is "an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single participant is probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 209). In this study, in-depth interviews are semi-structured, meaning that the researcher has a list of questions related to the specific topics to be covered which, in this case, are: brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity, relationships among the analyzed constructs, main outcomes and the impact of COVID-19 on the topics of experience, engagement and authenticity. Although semi-structured interviews have a list of questions to be addressed, they many times do not follow in the way previously outlined and other questions can come up as the interviewer can pick up on things said by the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Kumar et al., 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Semi-structured interviews are especially effective with busy executives and they have the advantage of capturing multiple realities, detailed information regarding attitudes, opinions and values, enabling immediate clarification and follow-up and catching verbal and non-verbal elements to be included in the analysis (Jennings, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

2.4.1 Research setting and sampling

Defining the sampling in qualitative interviewing is a challenging task. Therefore, it is important to identify the methods to define how the interviewees are selected and how many they are (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In Study three, the criteria defined to identify the interviewees are people who are experts in the field of hospitality, namely in upscale and luxury hotels due to their practical experience in the hospitality sector. To set up the research sample we identified individuals who matched the described profile and also asked some experts in the field to suggest potential interviewees (snowball effect) (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which enabled us to perform 11 in-depth interviews. We chose to interview top managers who are key decision makers and have a strategic vision about the sector. Therefore, a sample composed by 11 individuals with current job positions such as CEOs, Board Members, Sales and Marketing directors, Hospitality consultants, General Managers and Directors, is used.

To approach the potential interviewees, we sent an e-mail with a short outline of the nature and purpose of the study. Some of the potential participants, before accepting to participate in the study, asked for more information, inclusively, the list of issues to be addressed in the interview.

In the last interviews it seemed that the same patterns of answers were appearing, leading to a sense that additional data collection would result in similar findings. Therefore, we decided to stop the interviews from that moment on. In fact, it was decided not to collect more data when a sense of saturation was achieved (theoretical saturation criterion), as it is recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2016).

2.4.2 Interview procedures and guidelines

As previously stated, the main objectives of Study three are to capture the perspective of the hospitality managers, who are experts in the field and to shed light on the conceptual framework proposed in the current research, that is tested in Study four. Although the proposed conceptual framework emerged from the literature review performed, managers´ views regarding the possible relationships among brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity and their perspectives regarding possible outcomes, enlightened the proposed conceptual model. The topics covered on the interview, as well as the questions included in the interview guide emerge from the literature review performed. In fact, the literature review establishes the domain that the interview explores and helps the researcher to identify the main categories and relationships that the interview should cover (McCracken, 1988).

The interview guide developed follows several steps, as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011). Firstly, the topic areas are identified. Secondly, the questions for each topic are developed and prepared to be presented with a specific flow. However, the researcher is prepared to change the order of questions during the interview. This, in fact, happened in some interviews as they ended up having a different flow, compared to what was previously planned. Thirdly, context information about the participants like name, gender, age, job position and years of experience in the field is also collected, usually in the beginning of the interview. Finally, general information like date of the interview and duration are also registered, at the end of the interview. Please see the interview guide in Annex A.

The interviewer started all the interviews by doing a recap of the nature and the objectives of the research being held, by thanking the participants for having accepted to participate in the study and asking for permission to record the session. Concerning the kinds of questions, we opted to start each topic with grand-tour questions (opening, nondirective questions) to sustain an unobtrusive attitude and an environment where respondents would feel comfortable to express their own opinions (McCracken, 1988). For instance, while addressing the topic of brand authenticity, we started with the question "Do you think this concept of authenticity can be applied to hospitality in general and to upscale hotels in particular?" and then moved to a more direct question "What is an authentic hotel?".

Another very important topic in research is flexibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016) and in the current research, this has been widely applied. In the case of the in-depth interviews, this flexibility is reflected on the capacity to vary the order of the questions while interviewing, to follow up leads during the interview and also to adjust the interview guide after it was designed. In fact, the interviews occurred from May 2020 to July 2020, in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, and this situation has strongly impacted the research design of this study. On the one hand, the last research question, concerning the impact that COVID-19 pandemic situation and post-COVID-19 could have on the hospitality sector in general and on the constructs under study, was added afterwards, when we realized the global impact that this situation could have. Moreover, as the pandemic situation started before the interviews took place, this topic was also added to the interview guide as we felt that it was an important opportunity to understand hospitality managers´ opinions about the impact that this could have on global economy and society and, in particular, on tourism and hospitality sectors. As the pandemic situation demands for social distancing, in-depth interviews were not performed face to face. They were done online, to ensure all the security and safety requirements.

The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1h40. The participants authorized the recording of the interviews and this was performed using a digital audio recorder. Afterwards, all the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Although the transcription of audio tapes is very time consuming, the researcher chose not to use a software for transcription, to ensure the transcription was as accurate as possible. After transcribing the interviews, the transcriptions were shared with the interviewees to increase the transparency of the process.

Finally, after each interview, the researcher registered her main observations of the interview, as observation plays a very important role in qualitative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

2.4.3 Data analysis

According to Malhotra et al. (2017), qualitative data analysis starts with data assembly which means gathering and organizing the collected data, followed by a stage of data reduction that involves organizing, structuring and selecting the data that will, in fact, be used. To reduce the data involves a process of coding which is "breaking down qualitative data into discrete chunks and attaching a reference to those chunks of data" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 244). The following step is data display, that involves organizing and presenting an assembly of information to achieve conclusions. Several forms to display information can be used like extended text, matrices, charts etc. Finally, the last step is data verification which involves looking for possible alternative explanations of the interpretations of qualitative data, based on other data sources.

In Study three, content analysis is applied as it is "an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 291). For the qualitative part of this research, we follow the process suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016) which falls into 7 phases: 1) organizing the data, 2) immersion in the data, 3) identify possible categories and themes and generate case summaries, 4) coding the data, 5) offering interpretations and producing analytical memos, 6) searching for alternative interpretations, and 7) writing the report. Firstly, we gather and organize the data, namely, the audio recordings of the interviews, the transcripts of the interviews and the notes of the observations of the interviews. Then, we read several times the transcripts and listen to the recordings to get familiar with the material. In the following step, possible categories/ codes are identified. These codes are, in fact, clusters of similar ideas, concepts or themes. The creation of these clusters starts with a main topic and evolves to subclusters/ subcategories that are related to the main clusters/ categories. In our

research, these categories derive from the literature review performed- *theory-generated codes*- and also emerge from the data collected. For instance, the different dimensions and attributes associated with brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, that are created as codes, derive from the literature review but in the case of the stimuli to provide the desired experience or the stimuli associated with perceptions of authenticity, these emerge from the data collected through the in-depth interviews. Coding the data is supported by the use of NVivo- qualitative analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020). During the process, we also managed to write notes, memos that helped to summarize key ideas about what the codes signified. After identifying the themes and categories and coding the data, the objective is to bring meaning and coherence to the themes, in order to find patterns and establish links among categories. In other words, offering interpretations means offering explanations and drawing conclusions based on what was found. After interpreting the data, we look for possible alternative explanations. Therefore, we used our notes from the observations of the interviews and also secondary data (scientific articles from the literature, articles from journals and magazines of the sector and the websites of hotels) to realize if other explanations could also be drawn. Indeed, data triangulation helped us to fine tune the analysis performed. Finally, we end the process writing the report.

2.5 Questionnaire

Another tool employed in this research is the questionnaire. A questionnaire is "a structured technique for data collection consisting of a series of questions, written or verbal, that a participant answers" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 374). The main advantages of a questionnaire/ survey is that it can collect a great amount of data about different individuals at one time, can be employed in any setting and with any group and can be easily adapted to the research objectives (Kumar et al., 2019). In the current research, a questionnaire is used as a tool to collect data in Study four. The survey was applied to customers who had stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months. The questionnaire was done in Portuguese and English, so that non-Portuguese speaking individuals could also participate in the survey. Study four applies a quantitative approach and its main objective is to establish the relationships among the identified variables (brand experience, brand authenticity perceptions, customer engagement and possible outcomes). Based on the proposed conceptual framework, Study four aims to test the suggested hypotheses.

2.5.1 Research setting and sampling

To empirically test the proposed model, an online survey was developed, using the Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2020). Data were collected online from February 2020 to September 2020. Of 313 completed surveys collected (267 from the Portuguese version questionnaire and 46 from the English version questionnaire), 310 were valid as they revealed consistency. From these, 207 questionnaires corresponded to customers who had effectively stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months. Therefore, these 207 questionnaires were the ones used for further analysis.

2.5.2 Questionnaire procedures and guidelines

While designing the questionnaire, it is important to follow a specific process, as suggested by Malhotra et al. (2017). In order to develop the questionnaire for the current research, we started by specifying the information needed. Then, the type of interviewing method was defined which, in this case, was an online survey, using the Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2020). In fact, online surveys have become the dominant means of delivering surveys as they are fast, compared to other survey methods (Malhotra et al., 2017) and enable individuals from different geographies to participate on the survey. Next, we determined the content of each question. In order to define the questions to introduce in the questionnaire, we searched in the literature for validated scales to measure the constructs of brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity and the outcomes of authentic pride and behavioral intentions (used as a proxy for loyalty). Our aim is to apply scales to measure the constructs that have already been validated in the tourism and/ or hospitality context. Firstly, to measure brand experience we adapted the scale of Brakus et al. (2009). This scale was originally developed taking into account brands from different industries, but it is also applied to the hotel context (e.g. Manthiou et al., 2016). Secondly, to measure customer engagement we adapted the scale of So et al. (2014) that is, in fact, applied to the hotel and airlines context. Other studies have also used this scale in the hotel context (e.g. Shin & Back, 2020). In the case of brand authenticity, it is measured in the current study based on the scale of Akbar and Wymer (2017). This scale has already been applied to the hotel context (e.g. Mody & Hanks, 2019). In the case of the constructs of authentic pride and behavioral intentions (used as a proxy for loyalty), the scales were adapted from Loureiro (2019) and Loureiro (2014), respectively. Loureiro (2019) studies the concept of authentic pride within the museums context and in Loureiro (2014) behavioral intentions are measured in the rural tourism context.

To ensure that participants were able and willing to answer to the questionnaire, filter questions were the first ones to be answered. So, the first two questions of the survey were: "Do you agree to participate in this survey?" and "Have you stayed (at least one night) in an "upscale" hotel in the last 12 months?". Only the individuals who agreed to participate in the survey and had stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months could continue the questionnaire. We decided to include only customers who had been in this type of hotel in the previous year to ensure that the guests would remember well the experience. Concerning the structure of the questions and the wording, we decided to use mainly structured questions and to use simple and unambiguous words. Seven-point Likert scales and a seven-point semantic scale were used as measurement scales. Then, we arranged the questions in an order that seemed logic. For instance, the questions related to one topic were asked before beginning another topic and we used "brief transitional phrases…to help participants to switch their train of thought" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 395). Moreover, we also paid attention to the form and layout of the questionnaire as they are important to ensure that the survey is easy to read and to understand. Finally, we did a pilot-testing which was very useful to adjust the final questionnaire.

As we had a questionnaire in Portuguese and in English, we pre-tested both versions. As the original measurement scales were published in English, we translated them to Portuguese, for the Portuguese version of the questionnaire. The translation and back translation process was applied (Sekaran, 1983). We managed to have a small sample of 10 participants who had stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months and were fluent in Portuguese and/ or English. Therefore, some of them pre-tested the Portuguese version of the questionnaire and the others the English version. After the pre-test was completed, an extensive debrief was held with the participants to receive their feedback and identify possible problems. In fact, the pilot-testing revealed to be extremely useful. Firstly, we had decided to use the Likert scales as they were employed in the original scales (some of them were 7-point scales and other 5-point scales). However, in the pre-test this proved to be confusing for participants. Therefore, in the final questionnaire we decided to harmonize by using only 7-point rating scales. Another topic that came out was the use of negative statements. In the pilot-testing we decided to use the statements as they were in the original scale and, as some of them were in the negative form, we kept that form. However, in the pilot-testing we realized that this was leading to confusion and misinterpretation. Therefore, for the final questionnaire we decided to adjust and used only positive statements. Moreover, certain items, in the original scale, seemed duplicated from the point of view of participants- probably introduced for the purpose of assessing reliability or validity. However, based on the feedback received in the pilot-testing, we decided to change

the original order of these items. Finally, the words that led to ambiguous meanings were also replaced.

The final survey includes 7 sections. The first section includes filter questions, asking participants if they had stayed in an upscale hotel in the last 12 months and also asking them to identify the name of the upscale hotel where they had stayed most recently. Only the respondents who had stayed in this type of hotel were allowed to proceed to the next questions. The other sections are related to the hotel identified by the respondents (the upscale hotel where participants had stayed most recently). The second section is related to the customers´ experience in this hotel, the third section related to the customers´ engagement with that hotel and the fourth section addresses the guests´ perceptions regarding the hotel authenticity. The fifth and sixth sections address questions related to what customers felt while staying at the hotel (authentic pride) and what they planned to do after staying at the hotel (behavioral intentions). The last section collects demographic information. Annex B displays the set of questions from which the analysis performed in Study four emerge.

2.5.3 Data Analysis

In our study, to examine the drivers and outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement, we use PLS structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to assess the validity of the scales and to empirically test our hypotheses. The program used in this research is SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a class of multivariate techniques and combines some aspects of factor analysis and regression, which enables the researcher to analyze the relationships among the variables (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). PLS-SEM is considered a variance-based approach to SEM and it is recommended when the research objective is "theory development and explanation of variance (prediction of the constructs)" (Hair Jr. et al., 2017, p. 17). PLS-SEM is recommended when "the goal is predicting key target constructs or identifying "driver" constructs" (Hair Jr. et al., 2017, p. 23), which is, in fact, the case of the current research. Compared to covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM can be widely applied to a variety of research situations as it works efficiently when the structural model is complex, with small sample sizes and can also be used when data are nonnormally distributed (Hair Jr. et al., 2017; Risitano et al., 2017). In the SEM framework, the structural model is used to show how the latent variables (constructs) are related to each other and the measurement model reflects how the latent variables (constructs) are measured (Hair Jr. et al., 2017).

Based on the literature review performed, one can realize that PLS-SEM has been applied to analyze some of the constructs under study, namely customer engagement and brand authenticity (e.g., Akbar & Wymer, 2017; Lacœuilhe et al., 2017; Verhagen et al., 2015; Wiedmann et al., 2011).

2.6 Focus Groups

In the current research, Focus Groups with guests are used as a tool to collect data in Study five. Study five main objectives are, on the one hand, to enlighten the questionnaire´s results and, on the other hand, to address some topics that have not been covered with the questionnaire in the Study four, namely, the stimuli/ atmospheric cues of both brand experience and brand authenticity and the guests´ perspectives regarding the impact of Covid-19 on upscale hotels and on the topics of experience, engagement and authenticity.

A focus group is defined as "a discussion conducted by a trained moderator among a small group of participants in an unstructured and natural manner" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 183). The main objective of the focus group is to gain insights about a specific topic that emerge from the discussion among group members and also from the different stimuli that come up during the discussion (Jennings, 2010; Kumar et al., 2019; Malhotra et al., 2017). Sometimes, misconceptions about focus groups can arise as some researchers consider that qualitative techniques play a preliminary role before the use of a conclusive technique. However, "focus groups can serve a useful role as the first stage of developing questionnaires or experiments, but that is not their sole purpose. Focus groups can illuminate and indeed help to validate many of the statistical findings that emerge from surveys" (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 197). This is, in fact, their role in the current study as focus groups are used, primarily, to help the interpretation of the relationships established in Study four.

2.6.1 Research setting and sampling

For the Study five, two focus groups were held in June 2020 and in July 2020, respectively. Participants for each group were selected using a convenience, and also a snowball approach. The participants were selected because they share a specific characteristic that is relevant for the current study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) which, in this case, is the fact that they had been in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months (the period between June 2019 and June 2020). Besides the above mentioned criterion used to select the participants, we also used age as a criterion to compose the groups because we considered that different generations could have

different perspectives on the topics under study, especially in the case of the topic related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in tourism in general and in upscale hotels in particular. Therefore, two focus groups were held, one of them composed of 8 people who were less than 40 years old and the other focus group composed of 5 people who were more than 40 years old. All group members are Portuguese and the groups are balanced regarding gender. The participants were first contacted by e-mail, explaining the nature and the purpose of the research and also the reason why they were being contacted to participate in the focus group. Due to the pandemic situation and to comply with all the safety and security measures, focus groups were held online.

2.6.2 Focus groups procedures and guidelines

As suggested by Bryman and Bell (2011), the focus groups began with an introduction to the research, explaining the goals of the study and also thanking people for their participation. Afterwards, the moderator asked for permission to record the session and explained the reasons for this procedure, also explaining that data would be anonymized. The conventions of the focus group participation were also presented, highlighting the fact that each person should speak at a time, that everybody´s views were important and that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Concerning the questioning strategies employed, a more structured approach was used to cover all the topics. The moderator opened the discussion with more general, open-ended introductory questions so that participants could feel more comfortable with the topics under study and more engaged to participate in the discussion, as suggested by Malhotra et al. (2017). For instance, open questions like "Can you describe your experience in upscale hotels?" or "What do you remember from your last experience?" were used. And then, moving on the discussion to key questions to address the specific topics. For instance "What are the important elements that the hotel needs to have to achieve the expected experience?".

The length of the two focus groups was 1h15 and 1h20, respectively. Annex C presents the topics guide used for the Focus groups and addresses the following topics/ themes: introduction, brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity, relationships among the concepts, main outcomes and COVID-19 and after COVID-19 pandemic situation.

At the end of the focus groups sessions, the moderator registered her observations about the sessions, namely, concerning the interaction among participants and interpretations of particular silences. After that, the records of the sessions were transcribed.

2.6.3 Data Analysis

In Study five, content analysis is also applied, using the NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020). The process followed to analyze the data is the same as in Study three. As explained before, the process is suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and has 7 phases: 1) organizing the data, 2) immersion in the data, 3) identify possible categories and themes and generate case summaries, 4) coding the data, 5) offering interpretations and producing analytical memos, 6) searching for alternative interpretations, and 7) writing the report.

2.7 Ethical considerations

Researchers are required to follow ethical guidelines while conducting their research. The researchers´ ethical responsibilities towards the research participants involve the right of the participants not to be harmed, during or after the research, informed consent must be given by the participant after having received the necessary information about the study, the right of the participant to participate on a voluntary basis and to withdraw from the research at any time, while it is being conducted, the right of the individual to have his/her personal data and information treated as confidential or anonymous and the right of the individual not to be deceived with any aspect of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Jennings, 2010).

In the current research, in the first contact with the participants (interviewees and focus groups´ participants), the nature and the objectives of the study were explained, as well as how the participants were chosen. Moreover, an informed consent was elaborated for all the interviews and the focus groups and shared with all the participants. In the beginning of the interviews and the focus groups, the content of the informed consent was explained to the participants who agreed to participate in the study and gave permission for recording. The informed consent contains information about: the researchers, the objectives and nature of the study, the reason why the participants were chosen, the recording of the session to ensure a better comprehension of the data, the assurance that data would be anonymized, information about how the findings would be used and, finally, the assurance that the participation is voluntary. The informed consents that were developed for the interviews and focus groups are presented in Annex D and E. As they were written in Portuguese, we kept the original version in this thesis.

Concerning the quantitative part of the current research, records are also anonymous, and results are presented in an aggregated way. In the questionnaire applied in Study four, the introductory part explains the objectives of the study, ensures the anonymity of the data

obtained, explains that the results will be used for scientific and academic purposes and that the participation is volunteer. It also states the expected time of completion (see Annex B).

3. Study One- Systematic literature review Customer Engagement[*]

The purpose of the current study (Study One) is to systematically review and critically analyze the research about customer engagement. This methodological process will enable an overview of the current "state of the art" in relation to the scientific knowledge about customer engagement and point out avenues for the future. The most relevant articles are selected and analysed. Based on the identified articles, this study will: i) analyse the publication years of the articles, the scientific journals where they have been published, the authors publishing about the topic and the countries where the studies come from; ii) describe the contexts used more frequently in previous studies (the type of market); iii) describe the methodologies that have been used; iv) identify the different concept definitions present in the literature and the theoretical perspectives that have been explored so far; v) identify the different dimensions of the constructs and the measurement tools that are being used in the literature; vi) highlight the relationships that are being established in the literature between the analysed constructs and other constructs and vii) summarize the research gaps and future paths for research.

3.1 Planning and conducting the review

The systematic review is based on an identified review question (e.g., Christofi et al., 2019, 2021; Leonidou et al., 2020; Vrontis & Christofi, 2021). In the case of the present study, the review question to be addressed is: "What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?". While planning the review, scoping studies are analysed in order to delimit the subject area and to have a first contact with the theories, the constructs and the methodologies used (Tranfield et al., 2003). The analysis of these studies helps researchers to identify keywords and search terms based on which the review is performed.

The search is restricted to published peer-reviewed articles, in line with what has been done in other systematic literature reviews (e.g., Christofi et al., 2021; Leonidou et al., 2020; Vrontis & Christofi, 2021). To conduct this study two dominant academic databases are used to explore

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[*] This study has already been published. The article´s reference is:
Rosado-Pinto, F., & Loureiro, S. M. C. (2020). The growing complexity of customer engagement: a systematic review. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, *15*(2), 167–203. https://doi.org/10.1108/EMJB-10-2019-0126

and identify the main articles related to the analysed topic: Web of Science and Scopus. These databases are chosen amongst others because they provide the greatest coverage with peer-reviewed articles. The search for this study was done during July 2018 and the keywords used were: "customer engagement", "consumer engagement" and "brand engagement". The inclusion and exclusion criteria are defined by the researchers based on Macpherson and Holt (2007) (see Table 3.1). Defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria is a challenging and interactive task as researchers have to handle several discussions on the topic to achieve a common agreement. The research performed is not limited to a specific publication period, including all relevant studies independently of their publication year, as performed by Christofi et al. (2021) and by Leonidou et al. (2020).

In Web of Science, the search is made within the core collection. Articles are identified using the specific keyword in the "Topic". Moreover, some filters have been applied. On the one hand, the type of documents analysed are articles and reviews. On the other hand, to keep the search process specific to the objective, the Web of Science categories used are business; management; hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism; communication; ethics; psychology applied; psychology multidisciplinary; psychology social and psychology experimental. Another filter applied is the Quartile of the Journal. For articles found in the Web of Science database, articles of journals listed in JCR 2017 in the Quartiles Q1, Q2 or Q3, are included in the analysis. These quartiles are defined to ensure, on the one hand, that quality articles are included in the analysis and, on the other hand, that established journals - from different fields - are represented.

In Scopus, the search is conducted introducing the keywords in the "article title, abstract, keywords". The subject area, the document type and the language are used as filters. The subject areas are limited to "Business, Management and Accounting", "Social Sciences" and "Psychology". The document type searched are articles and reviews, and the language is English. Finally, only articles belonging to journals placed in Q1, Q2 or Q3 in the ranking of Scimago (SJR 2017) are included in the study.

Concerning the analysis based on the Web of Science electronic database, a total of 338 articles are identified with the keywords "customer engagement", 153 articles are found with the keywords "consumer engagement" and 126 articles with the keywords "brand engagement". Therefore, a total sum of 617 articles are selected. After taking out the duplicated articles, 486 articles are included in the analysis. From these, the articles that are not Q1, Q2 or Q3 in JCR2017 are excluded, which leads to 345 final articles. When analysing the Scopus database, the number of articles identified with the keywords "customer engagement", "consumer

engagement" and "brand engagement" are 378, 258 and 131, respectively. Thus, a total of 767 articles are selected. From these, and after taking out the duplicated articles, 693 articles are included in the analysis. The papers that are not included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 journals from Scimago 2017 (SJR 2017) are excluded, which leads to a total of 571 articles. When combining the selected articles from both databases and excluding the duplicated articles (when the same article is in both databases), this leads to a total of 648 papers (625 articles and 23 reviews). Figure 3.1 shows the selection process used to perform this systematic review.

Figure 3.1- Article selection process
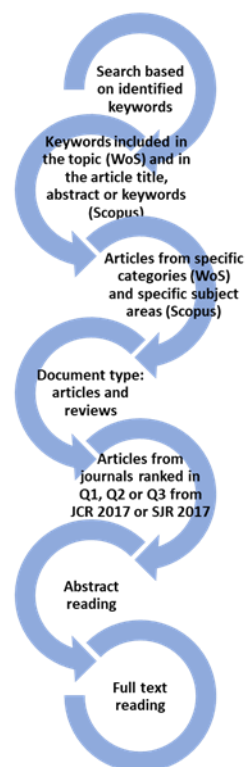
Source: Author´s elaboration

Table 3.1- Inclusion criteria and number of articles identified

Criteria	Filters - Screening Process	No. Articles identified
Electronic database: Web of Science (core collection)		
Topic	**"Customer Engagement"**	
Categories	Business; Management; Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism; Communication; Psychology Applied; Psychology multidisciplinary; Psychology Social; Psychology experimental	338
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Topic	**"Consumer Engagement"**	
Categories	Business; Management; Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism; Communication; Ethics; Psychology Applied; Psychology multidisciplinary; Psychology experimental	153
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Topic	**"Brand Engagement"**	
Categories	Business; Management; Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism; Communication; Psychology Applied; Psychology multidisciplinary; Psychology Social; Psychology experimental	126
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Total articles		617
Total articles excluding duplicated		486
Total articles excluding duplicated articles and included in JCR 2017 Q1, Q2 or Q3		345
Electronic database: Scopus		
Article Title, Abstract, Keywords	**"Customer Engagement"**	
Subject Area	Business, Management and Accounting; Social Sciences; Psychology	378
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Language	English	
Article Title, Abstract, Keywords	**"Consumer Engagement"**	

Criteria	Filters - Screening Process	No. Articles identified
Subject Area	Business, Management and Accounting; Social Sciences; Psychology	258
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Language	English	
Article Title, Abstract, Keywords	**"Brand Engagement"**	
Subject Area	Business, Management and Accounting; Social Sciences; Psychology	131
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Language	English	
Total articles		767
Total articles excluding duplicated articles		693
Total articles excluding duplicated articles and included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 in the ranking of Scimago (SJR 2017)		571
Electronic databases: Web of Science + Scopus		
Total articles from Web of Science and Scopus, excluding duplicated articles (the same article in both databases) and included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 (JCR 2017 and SJR 2017)		648
Total articles included in the analysis, after abstract reading		**147**
Total articles included in the analysis, after full text reading		**144**

Source: Author´s elaboration

At this stage, a review of the abstracts is performed by both researchers and abstracts are analysed according to the quality criteria defined by the researchers and presented in Table 3.2. The quality criteria defined is discussed by the researchers and adapted from other studies (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2004). Although 4 criteria have been defined, the

first criteria- the article is directly related to the objective of the research- is the first one to be applied and only in cases where abstracts meet this criterion, the other criteria are applied.

After reading the abstracts of all the articles, 147 papers remain. The full text reading leads to the elimination of 3 articles, which conducts to a total of 144 papers to be included in the analysis, as they are considered relevant to the engagement discussion. Then, researchers review the reference lists of the manuscripts included in the review to understand if there are important works that are not being included in the review, as suggested by Christofi et al. (2017). However, as the most referenced manuscripts from the reference lists analysed are included in the review performed, it seems that there is no need to add extra articles to the ones already considered. At this point, data are extracted from the selected articles and the analysis is performed. The data extracted aggregate article title, scientific journal, authors, publication year, methodology, methodology description, industry, country, theories, engagement definition, engagement dimensions, scales used, main objective, constructs, antecedents and outcomes, main conclusions, limitations/gaps and future research, among others.

Table 3.2- Quality criteria

Element	0: Absence	1: Low level	2: Medium level	3: High level	Not Applicable
1. Directly related to the objective of the research	There is not enough information to evaluate this criterion	Not related	Somehow related	Totally related	Not Applicable
2. Theory robustness	There is not enough information to evaluate this criterion	Weak development of literature	Superficial development of theories and constructs within existing literature	Robust use of theory	Not Applicable
3. Congruence of theory, methodology and findings	There is not enough information to evaluate this criterion	Incomplete data and not related to theory	Data somehow related to the arguments	Strong link between the arguments presented and data	Not Applicable
4. Contributions to theory and/or practice	There is not enough information to evaluate this criterion	Makes a low contribution	Makes a medium contribution	Makes a high contribution	Not Applicable

Source: Author´s elaboration, adapted from Pittaway et al. (2004) and Macpherson and Holt (2007).

3.2 Findings

Assessing the quality of the articles, summarizing the main information and reporting the findings is a challenging task (Christofi et al., 2017) conducted by the two researchers independently to minimize subjective interpretation biases. After that, the individual assessment of each researcher is aggregated and presented.

Publication Year

As highlighted by Brodie et al. (2011), very few articles addressing the engagement topic have been published before 2005. Although no time constrain has been introduced, no article before 2005 is included, which demonstrates that the topic is in early stage of development. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of the published articles per year. The number of articles included in the review, per period are: Period 1: 2005-2008 (2 articles), Period 2: 2009-2012 (15 articles), Period 3: 2013-2015 (31 articles) and Period 4: 2016-2018 (96 articles). From 2014 on there has been a significant increase of the number of engagement articles published and the last three years (period 4) account for 67% of the articles included in the review.

Figure 3.2- Articles Published by Year
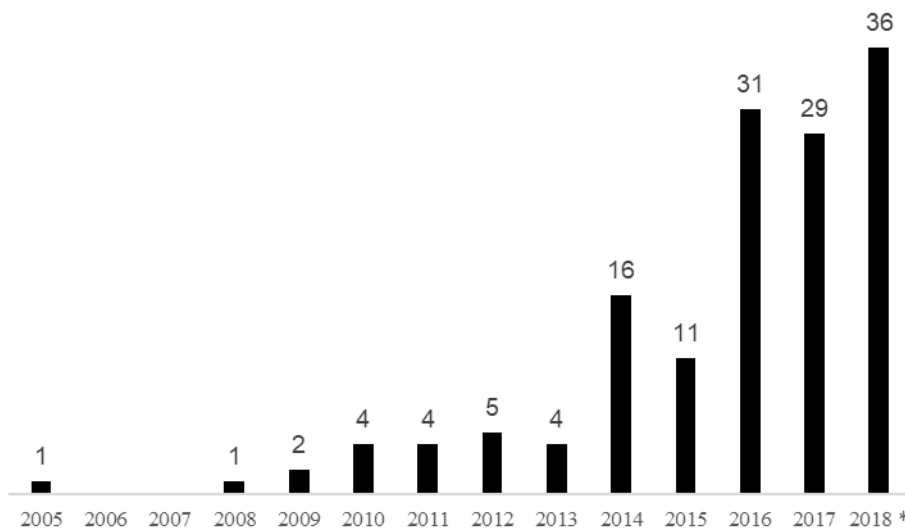
(*) The search was made until 25/07/2018, therefore, it does not include the 2018 Full Year.

Source: Author´s elaboration

The year of 2012 may be regarded as a milestone. The reason lies in the focus of the published articles. The majority of the articles (53%) until 2012 are conceptual and devoted to the

discussion of the engagement concept in marketing and the theories behind (Etgar, 2008; Bowden, 2009; Bijmolt et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef, et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Sashi, 2012). From 2012 on, the vast majority of the articles are empirical and context-specific, focusing on different industries (e.g., retailing, hotel, or restaurant).

The early publications point out to the nature of the concept, reflecting a motivational state of individuals (e.g., consumer, tourists, actor, and communities) with a particular object or agent (e.g., brands, organizations, offerings) (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011a; Patterson et al., 2006), comprising diverse relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioural facets/dimensions (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011b; Hollebeek, 2011a; Patterson et al., 2006), or recently the social dimension (e.g., Brodie et al., 2019), depending on the context online or offline (e.g., social media, online or offline communities, retailing stores). Kumar and Pansari focus their conceptualization on relationship and claim that engagement is an interaction between employees and customers. The interaction depends on the attitude that drives the behaviour of employees and customers towards a firm (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

Scientific Journals, Authorship and Countries

The 144 articles analysed are published in 59 different reputed peer-reviewed scientific journals. However, 60% of the articles analysed are published in only 15 of these journals (see Table 3.3). Among these, the dominant journals are: Journal of Services Marketing, Journal of Product and Brand Management and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services with 11, 10 and 9 articles published, respectively.

Table 3.3- Scientific Journals (Top 15)

Scientific Journal	Study count	% of Total
Journal of Services Marketing	11	8%
Journal of Product and Brand Management	10	7%
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	9	6%
Journal of Marketing Management	8	6%
Journal of Service Research	8	6%
Journal of Service Management	6	4%
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	5	3%
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	5	3%
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	5	3%
Journal of Business Research	4	3%
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	4	3%
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	3	2%
Journal of Advertising	3	2%
Journal of Brand Management	3	2%
Tourism Management	3	2%
Sub-Total	**87**	**60%**
Other Journals	**57**	**40%**
TOTAL	**144**	**100%**

Source: Author´s elaboration

A collaborative behaviour among researchers is predominant. In fact, 88% of the articles are authored by two or more researchers. Particularly, 22% of the articles are signed by two authors, 40% by three and 26% by four or more authors. Table 3.4 shows the main engagement research authors (the ones who have participated in two or more studies) who are included in the literature review conducted. Hollebeek and Brodie emerge as two of the most prolific authors.

Table 3.4-Main Engagement research authors

Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count
Hollebeek, LD	16	Sparks, BA	3	Evers, U	2	Malthouse, EC	2
Brodie, RJ	6	Sprott, DE	3	Fernandes, T	2	Melero-Polo, I	2
Rahman, Z	6	Verhoef, PC	3	Flynn, L.R	2	Miles, MP	2
Islam, J.U	5	Andreassen, TW	2	Gabbott, M	2	Morgan, RM	2
Bowden, JLH	4	Beatty, S.E	2	Gambetti, R.C	2	Morgan-Thomas, A	2
Juric, B	4	Cambra-Fierro, J	2	Goldsmith, R.E	2	Naumann, K	2
Kumar, V	4	Carlson, J	2	Graffigna, G	2	Nyadzayo, MW	2
Aksoy, L	3	Chan, ESW	2	Harrigan, P	2	Spangenberg, ER	2
Alexander, MJ	3	Chathoth, PK	2	Harrington, RJ	2	Thakur, R	2
Johnson, LW	3	Clark, R.A	2	Heinonen, K	2	Ungson, GR	2
King, C	3	Czellar, S	2	Ilic, A	2	van Doorn, J	2
Merrilees, B	3	Daly, T	2	Jaakkola, E	2	Veloutsou, C	2
Pansari, A	3	De Vries, NJ	2	Kabadayi, S	2	Vivek, S.D	2
So, KKF	3	Dessart, L	2	Leckie, C	2	Wang, Y	2
Solem, BAA	3	Dwivedi, A	2	Luoma-Aho, V	2		

Source: Author´s elaboration

In order to identify the intensity of research around the globe, a country-wise classification is conducted. The country classification is done based on the place where the empirical study is performed and, in the case of studies involving online platforms, the country of origin of the participants, when it is identified. Therefore, in the case of the conceptual studies and literature reviews, the classification given is "N.A" (Not Applicable) and for studies that do not identify the place where the data are collected, the classification given is "Undisclosed". When data are collected in three or more countries, it is classified as "Multiple".

This study finds that the 144 articles identified come from different countries around the world, being the top countries Australia (12 articles), India (10 articles) and United States (10 articles), as shown in Table 3.5. Europe is the most represented continent and Africa is the least represented.

Table 3.5- Country-wise distribution of articles

Continent	Country	Study count	% of Total
Europe	Spain	4	3%
	Poland	2	1%
	Netherlands	2	1%
	Finland	2	1%
	Portugal	2	1%
	France	2	1%
	Italy	2	1%
	Lithuania	2	1%
	Greece	1	1%
	Belgium	1	1%
	Russia	1	1%
	Norway	1	1%
	United Kingdom	1	1%
	Ireland	1	1%
	Germany; Switzerland	1	1%
Europe Total		**25**	**17%**
Asia	India	10	7%
	China	4	3%
	Taiwan	3	2%
	Hong Kong	1	1%
	Malaysia	1	1%
	Thailand	1	1%
	Jordan	1	1%
	Indonesia	1	1%
Asia Total		**22**	**15%**

Continent	Country	Study count	% of Total
Oceania	Australia	12	8%
	New Zealand	3	2%
Oceania Total		**15**	**10%**
America	USA	10	7%
	USA; Mexico	1	1%
	Chile	1	1%
America Total		**12**	**8%**
Multiple	Multiple	5	3%
	USA; China	2	1%
	USA and South Korea	1	1%
	Italy; USA	1	1%
	Uk; China	1	1%
Multiple Total		**10**	**7%**
Africa	Ghana	2	1%
Africa Total		**2**	**1%**
Undisclosed	Undisclosed	31	22%
Undisclosed Total		**31**	**22%**
N.A	N.A	27	19%
N.A Total		**27**	**19%**
Total Geral		**144**	**100%**

Source: Author´s elaboration

Research Context and Methodology Applied

In what concerns the research context (industries/ markets in which the empirical study is developed), the literature review reveals a wide diversity (see Table 3.6). The studies classified with "N.A" (Not Applicable) are the conceptual studies or the literature reviews.

Hence, 15% of the studies are performed in multiple industries, meaning that the empirical setting considered two or more different industries in online or offline environments. Studies that included too specific or indiscriminate industries are classified as "Other goods", "Other services" and "Other Tourism and Hospitality". Twenty-one percent of the studies do not disclose the industry analysed, as many of them focused on customer/ consumer/ brand/ community engagement within the online context (e.g., social media, online brand communities). The growing number of articles whose context is online may be explained by the increasing importance of the online environment for the activity of the firm/brand. For instance, in Europe Union 69 % of internet users shopped online during 2018 (Eurostat, 2019).

Table 3.6- Research Context (Industries analysed)

Industries covered in studies	Study count	% of Total
Multiple industries	22	15%
Consumer Electronics	11	8%
Financial Services	8	6%
Hotels	7	5%
Retail	7	5%
Luxury	4	3%
Entertainment	4	3%
Transports	4	3%
Fashion & Apparel	4	3%
Tourism	3	2%
Health Care Services	3	2%
Food & Beverages	3	2%
Restaurants	2	1%
Other Goods	2	1%
Government & NGO	2	1%
Travel agencies	1	1%
Other Services	1	1%
Online services	1	1%
Undisclosed	30	21%
N.A	25	17%
Total	**144**	**100%**

Source: Author´s elaboration

The articles analysed are mainly empirical (81%) (see Figure 3.3). Here, empirical is the classification given to all studies that employ quantitative, qualitative or mix-approach methodologies. The difference between literature studies and conceptual framework lies on the fact that the latter have a proposal framework. Figure 3.4 shows how the methodologies used have evolved over time. Empirical studies are more prominent after 2012, which may eventually be justified by the effort of MSI to create a priority research around the topic (Marketing Science Institute, 2018) and some authors with more publications.

Figure 3.3- Methodologies used
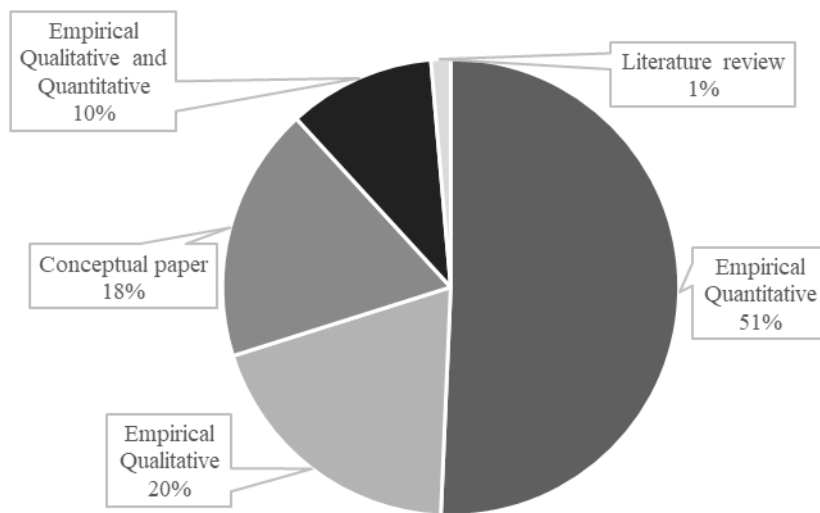
Source: Author´s elaboration

Figure 3.4- Methodologies used: evolution along the years
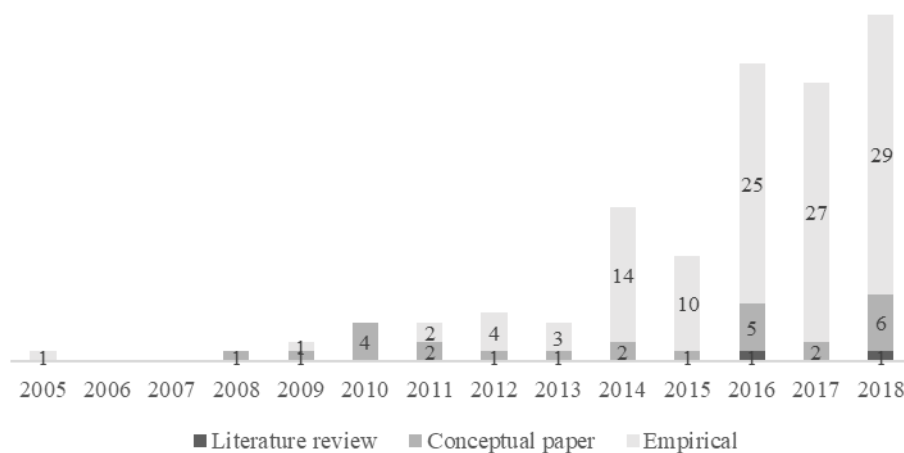
Source: Author´s elaboration

Theoretical Background

The articles present different theoretical perspectives (see Figure 3.5). The last column of figure 3.5 with the designation "others" represents the number of articles that point to a theory that has not been mentioned in any other (e.g., Equity theory, Extended-self theory, Commitment trust theory, Flow theory or Lead-user theory).

Within the articles analysed, 35 do not mention a specific theory adopted to support the study. Of all the theories cited in the articles, two emerge as the most prominent: relationship marketing and service-dominant logic. The first is the theoretical foundation in 40 articles and the second is mentioned in 36 articles. These theories are also highlighted by Islam and Rahman (2016) in their literature review.

Relationship Marketing theory refers to "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). According to Pansari and Kumar (2017), the objectives of organizations have evolved over time and the transaction-based perspective was replaced by relationship marketing, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Within this new perspective, firms are essentially focused on establishing positive relationships with customers and, through their products/ services and experiences, ensure satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, customer engagement is embedded in the relationship marketing literature because it represents an interactive process between employees and consumers and "will encourage more research that goes "beyond the purchase" and that is focused on customer (and noncustomer) experiences with the brand or product than we currently see in the area" (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 127).

The service-dominant logic is another key theory in which customer engagement is integrated. From an historical perspective, marketing has evolved from a goods-dominant view –dominated by tangible outputs- to a service-dominant view, where relationships and intangibility are key (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Therefore, the value of a service/brand is defined and conjoint co-created with the consumer. The consumer's role shifts from someone who is merely the recipient of the goods to someone who actively participates in the co-production of the service. Vargo and Lush (2004) reinforce that the appropriate unit of exchange is no longer the tangible good but the application of competencies, knowledge and skills that benefit the receiver.

Brodie et al. (2011) suggest that the theoretical foundations of customer engagement are the relationship marketing theory and the service-dominant (S-D) logic. They also claim that some of the foundational premises underlying the S-D logic are very important to determine the conceptual foundation underlying customer engagement. The S-D logic assumes that the consumer is a co-creator of value, the actors involved (social and economic) are resource integrators and value is determined by the beneficiary.

Kumar and colleagues focus their attention on the relationship marketing theory. Here, the whole process to establish, maintain and interact in the relationship between employees and customers translate the engagement process (e.g., Gupta et al., 2018; Kumar & Pansari, 2016;

Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Employees should be committed with the mission of the organization, satisfied for working there and empowered to be engaged and closely cooperate with customers in a real time interaction (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Although not so often employed as the above two, other five theories are also emphasized by researchers: (i) Uses and Gratification theory, (ii) Social Exchange theory, (iii) Social Identity theory, (iv) Regulatory Engagement theory and (v) Consumer/ Customer Engagement theory. The Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) has been developed to explain why people actively seek specific media (Calder et al., 2016) to fulfil their needs. The motivation behind the choice of a specific media includes "utilitarian information, hedonic/emotional entertainment, social interaction and personal identity" (Maslowska et al., 2016, p. 481). Although this theory is originally developed to apply mainly to communications, in the last years UGT has been used as a theoretical background in different marketing situations, such as to explain engagement through the use of technology (Calder et al., 2016). Consumers select a media and are motivated to use it because gain gratification from the experience through that media and thus get engaged.

Social Exchange theory (SET) offers a conceptual foundation for customer brand engagement as it is aligned with the concept of "reciprocity", also present in the conceptualization of brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011b). Based on this theory, customers are expected to reciprocate positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards an object (e.g., brand/products), after receiving benefits from the relationship with the brand/firm. In fact, reciprocity has been highlighted as a very important interpersonal norm of marketing relationships as it leads to personal well-being, giving motivation to develop and maintain relationships (Pervan et al., 2009).

The social identity theory assumes that individuals have both a personal identity encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics and a social identity that is related to group classifications (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The groups where consumers are members, which, in the case of brands, are the brands with which a consumer engages, are a manifestation of the brand's social identity function (Harrigan et al., 2017). The concept of identification comes from the social identity theory (So et al., 2014).

Higgins and Scholer (2009, p. 102) broaden the Regulatory Engagement Theory (RET) and define engagement as "…a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something—sustained attention". Thus, a strong engagement may reinforce the perceived value of an object made by an individual, both positively and negatively.

Finally, a specific theory of *Consumer/ Customer* engagement seems to start to emerge in marketing literature. As Romero (2017, p. 567) claims, "the development of a customer engagement theory is still in its early stages". Pansari and Kumar (2017) state that the tenets of relationship marketing are included in the engagement theory as the process of engaging a customer is the next step after the creation of the relationship. They argue that when a relationship is satisfying and has emotional connection, partners become engaged. In the near future, these or other researchers may propose a complete theoretical foundation for engagement in marketing.

Figure 3.5- Theoretical background: referred theories
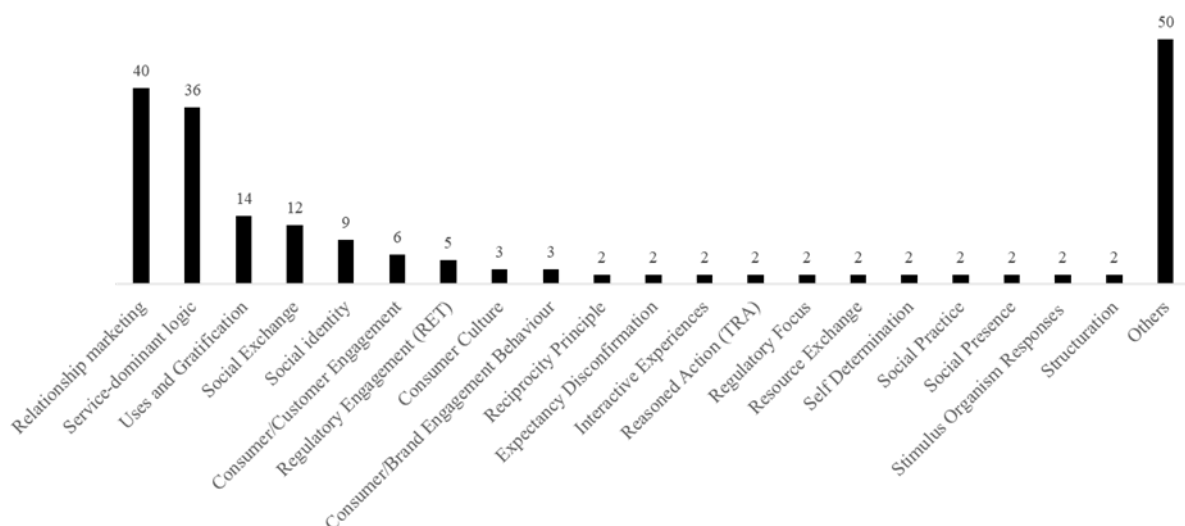
Source: Author´s elaboration

Engagement Conceptual Roots and Sub-forms

The concept of engagement has been explored in different fields (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011a; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). For example, in psychology it is called "social engagement" representing the process of individuals to communicate emphatically with others in society (Achterberg et al., 2003). In management/organization, it is designated as "employee engagement" (Catteeuw et al., 2007), but other expressions are also used as "stakeholder engagement" or "job engagement" (Corus & Ozanne, 2012; Hernandez & Guarana, 2018). Within this last field, researchers tend to deal with engagement as the investment of individuals' cognitive, emotional, and physical energies and capabilities into task performance (Hernandez & Guarana, 2018).

Although the engagement topic has been analysed and discussed across fields, in this study the marketing is the core field, where several definitions have been developed over time (see Table 3.7). Thus, some researchers regard engagement as a psychological process that drives customer loyalty (Bowden, 2009), or a psychological state that occurs as a result of customers´ experiences with an object (brand) in a service relationship (Brodie et al., 2011). Others, focus their attention on the behavioural dimension of the concept (Verhoef et al., 2010), where behavioural means participation beyond transactions, that is, the intensity that individuals are connecting with a firm´s offerings/activities (Vivek et al., 2012).

Kumar et al. (2010) argue that customers can create value for a firm in many different ways. Building on this assumption, Pansari and Kumar (2017) define customer engagement as the mechanics that customers use to add value to the firm. In this vein, engagement is deeply associated with participation and cooperation between individuals and firms, creating an overlap of mutual interests and consequently specific behaviours such as: word-of-mouth (WOM) activity, helping other customers, blogging, giving recommendations or writing reviews (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Oh et al., 2017).

The analysis of the engagement literature indicates that different sub-forms of engagement have emerged. Examples of these sub-forms are "customer engagement", "consumer engagement" and "brand engagement". Thus, several researchers use the expression "consumer engagement" (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015, 2016) and others "brand engagement" (Hollebeek, 2011a) or "consumer brand engagement" (Dwivedi, 2015; Gambetti et al., 2012; Hollebeek et al., 2014), but all of them consider a focal object of engagement that could be the brand or the firm.

As studies advance over time, four major trends seem to draw on the concerns of conceptualization: (i) specific context, (ii) actor engagement, (iii) engagement valence, and (iv) global engagement.

Specific characteristics of engagement or specific contexts within which the engagement process develops - such as virtual communities or market behaviour - have lead researchers to create concepts and develop scales with certain unique specificities (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018; Sprott et al., 2009). Indeed, the technological developments of digital and social media claim for studies in online environments, with some studies dedicated to online brand communities (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2018) and others to social media, where the expression of "social media engagement" is used (e.g., Chahal & Rani, 2017; Voorveld et al., 2018).

Another important concept that stands out is the topic of "actor engagement". Some studies have presented an evolution of the engagement thematic, from a dyadic-focused customer perspective to a more generalized network of actors (Alexander et al., 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2018; Storbacka et al., 2016; Brodie et al., 2019). This network and actor perspectives include customers, employees, community members or suppliers, which means that the concept of engagement starts being applied to the different human actors who are present in a service ecosystem (Li et al., 2018). For instance, Kumar and Pansari (2016) focus on understanding the phenomena applied to the internal (employees) and external (customers) stakeholders of the firm.

The idea of "engagement valence" can contribute to understand the actor engagement concept. In this line, Li et al. (2018) point out that engagement studies have primarily focused on the positive side and neglected the "dark" side of engagement. Thus, in a network where several actors are involved in the engagement process, some may be imbued with the spirit of active and favourable participation and cooperation and others not (may even denigrate the firm to their peers) (Bowden et al., 2017; Heinonen, 2018; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014).

The increasing global competition and the amount of interactions among consumers worldwide has led firms to seek to understand the behavioural activities of customers around the world, that keep them engaged. To do so, researchers recommend that managers should have a deeper understanding about the countries´ economic and cultural factors in order to understand the phenomena of "global customer engagement" (Gupta et al., 2018).

Table 3.7- Engagement conceptualisations in the marketing literature from selected studies

Author(s)	Research Type	Construct	Definition
(Brodie et al., 2011, p. 260)	Conceptual	Customer Engagement	Customer engagement (CE) is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships.
(Verhoef et al., 2010, p. 247)	Conceptual	Customer Engagement	Customer engagement is considered as a behavioural manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions.
(Vivek et al., 2012, p. 127)	Empirical Qualitative	Customer Engagement	We define CE as the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/ or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate.
(Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790)	Conceptual	Customer Brand Engagement	…the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions.

Author(s)	Research Type	Construct	Definition
(van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253)	Conceptual	Customer Engagement Behaviours (CEBs)	…we define as the customers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.
(Sprott et al., 2009, p. 92)	Empirical Quantitative	Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC)	…an individual difference representing consumers' propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves.
(Storbacka et al., 2016, p. 3009)	Conceptual	Actor Engagement	… (AE) is conceptualized as both the disposition of actors to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context provided by a service ecosystem.
(Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 498)	Empirical Quantitative	Engagement	We define engagement as the attitude, behaviour, the level of connectedness (1) among customers, (2) between customers and employees, and (3) of customers and employees within a firm.

Source: Author´s elaboration

Customer Engagement Dimensions

Past research presents diverse multidimensional perspectives of the engagement construct in marketing, where cognitive, behavioural, emotional and even social dimensions are the most cited and applied (e.g., Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016; Gambetti et al., 2012; Romero, 2017). Although multidimensionality tends to be more often used, some studies opt for a unidimensional perspective (e.g., Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Romero, 2017; Sprott et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2013). Within this unidimensional perspective, behavioural tends to be the elected dimension (e.g., Romero, 2017).

The cognitive dimension is seen as a "set of enduring and active mental states that a consumer experiences" (Dessart et al., 2016, p. 410) and cognitive brand-related activity is perceived as "…the individual´s level of concentration and/or engrossment in the brand…" (Hollebeek, 2011a, p. 790). The affective/ emotional dimension is a "summative and enduring level of emotions experienced by a consumer" and the behavioural dimension includes the "behavioural manifestations towards an engagement partner, beyond purchase, which results from motivational drivers" (Dessart et al., 2016, p. 410). A three-dimensional conceptualization of the construct, composed by conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection is also presented (Vivek et al., 2014).

Although not the most analysed (cognitive, behavioural and emotional have been more studied) so far, the social dimension may gain relevance in the near future as engagement conceptualization evolves from a dyadic perspective to a global network of interacting actors (e.g., Brodie et al., 2019; Hollebeek, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). Hence, the social dimension

expresses interaction, participation, dialogue, co-creation, and sharing values and comments that unite brands/firms and consumers or other actors in the market (e.g., Gambetti et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). The social dimension is facilitated by technology – from social media to crowdsourcing and others - which allows individuals in different countries in the world to be together and interact in real time (Gambetti et al., 2012; Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Spiritual engagement is an emerging dimension very scarcely explored in the marketing field (e.g., Bayighomog & Araslı, 2019; Taheri et al., 2019). Spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being at the workplace have been studied in industries such as healthcare, education or financial institutions asserting that intrinsic and transcendental motivation of employees enhances their positive attitude towards the organization, performance and well-being (e.g., Kaya, 2015; Markow & Klenke, 2005; Yang & Fry, 2018). Yet, more studies should emerge that incorporate this dimensionality from the perspective of consumer and other stakeholders (not only managers and employees). The spiritual dimension can be operated to go further and understand the interaction in a global network of engagement.

Customer Engagement Measurement Scales

The literature provides diverse measurement scales comprising a different number of dimensions, contexts and industries to be applied (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Vivek et al., 2014). For instance, Vivek et al. (2014) develop a three-dimensional conceptualization of customer engagement and present a 10-item scale to measure the construct. Yet, another study from Dessart et al. (2016) develops a dual-focus 22-item scale to measure consumer engagement. This scale reflects the existence of three dimensions - behavioural, cognitive and emotional - and seven sub-dimensions of engagement. The dimensions of engagement explored in the mentioned study are aligned with the ones presented by Brodie et al. (2013) and Hollebeek et al. (2014).

Another study presents a conceptualization of customer engagement as a second-order construct consisting of four dimensions (customer purchases, customer references, customer influence and customer knowledge/feedback) (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Sprott et al. (2009), however, propose a scale of eight items to measure Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC).

Regarding context and industry, a variety of studies have been suggested to measure consumer brand engagement in the specific setting of social media (Baldus et al., 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Within the hospitality industry, a scale has been developed and validated in order to measure customer engagement with tourism brands. This scale aggregates five factors (identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction) and has been

developed based on a survey fulfilled by hotel and airline customers (So et al., 2014). Harrigan et al. (2017) not only attempt to validate the scale proposed by So et al. (2014), but also suggest an alternative three-factor 11-item version of the scale that can be applied in both tourism and non-tourism contexts.

In the future, two scenarios may occur: (i) new studies trying to condense the different dimensions into a global scale that is employed in any context and industry or (ii) the continued proliferation of specific scales for each context and industry. In the last situation, future researchers should become very careful and critical when selecting the appropriate scale for the context and/or industry where the scale will be employed.

Antecedents and Outcomes of Customer Engagement

Several constructs related to engagement and its sub-forms have been studied as antecedents and outcomes (see Figure 3.6). Examples of such constructs are: Experience, Involvement, Satisfaction, Trust or Commitment. Some of them are related to customers (e.g., involvement, satisfaction, customer characteristics) and others are associated to the brand (e.g., brand equity, brand/service quality, brand characteristics, brand attitude). There are also other constructs connected to the firm, such as firm value or firm reputation and even others related to employees, for instance employee engagement. Experience, Involvement, Brand/ Brand-page interactivity, Satisfaction and Trust are the antecedents more frequently considered in past research. Brand Loyalty, Firm Performance, Word of Mouth (WOM), Satisfaction and Trust are the consequents that have been studied more often. Some variables are also regarded as moderators, like political, economic, environmental, social or technological factors.

Figure 3.6- Overview of the main antecedents and outcomes of engagement
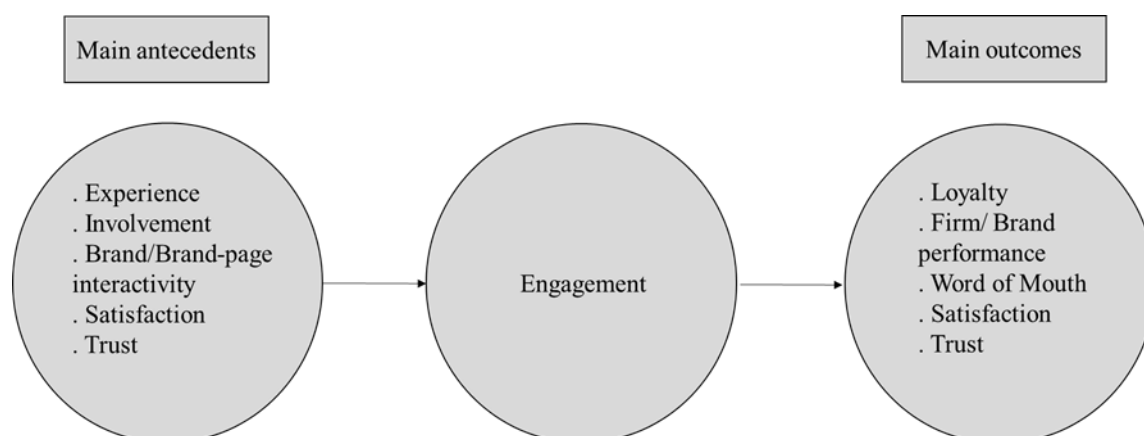
Source: Author´s elaboration

Experience has had a dual role as both antecedent (e.g., Merrilees, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017) and consequent (e.g., Khan et al., 2016; So et al., 2014). Customer experience may be defined as "…a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 71). Yet, the concept of Brand Experience is also frequently used, as "…subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53).

Involvement means "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Although the concepts of involvement and customer engagement are related, researchers tend to establish a conceptual distinction between the two concepts. So et al. (2014) argue that involvement tends to be confined to the cognition dimension while engagement involves other dimensions. Thus, involvement is regarded as a narrower concept than engagement (Hollebeek, 2011a) and has been widely studied as an antecedent (e.g. Dwivedi, 2015; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2012) and less often as an outcome (e.g., Fehrer et al., 2018).

Brand interactivity is regarded as the customers´ perception of the brand´s willingness and authentic desire for integration (France et al., 2016) and has been analysed as an antecedent. Other academics focus on brand-page interactivity and define it as "…a customer's perception that the brand page environment can facilitate the interaction between them, the brand and other customers of the brand community" (Carlson et al., 2018, p. 85).

Satisfaction is viewed as the customer´s overall evaluation of an offering (Gustafsson et al., 2005). Satisfaction is widely studied and recently tends to be associated to engagement acting as both antecedent (e.g., Cambra-Fierro et al., 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al., 2010) and consequent of customer engagement (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Fehrer et al., 2018). Finally, trust, meaning "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 315), is another construct considered as antecedent (e.g., Dessart et al., 2015; van Doorn et al., 2010) and outcome (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Vivek et al., 2012).

As for the outcomes of customer engagement, brand loyalty is the most frequently studied (e.g., De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek, 2011a). Brand loyalty can be defined as "…the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more

alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes" (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973, p. 2).

Second, Kumar and Pansari (2016) argue that when consumers and employees are engaged with the firm, the firm performance is positively affected because consumers purchase the firm´s products contributing to increase firm revenues. Thus, engaged consumers provide referrals that positively impact on firms´ profitability (e.g., Harmeling et al., 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016) . Finally, Hollebeek and Chen (2014) analyse electronic WOM as an outcome of brand engagement. Vivek et al. (2012) allude that customers who are highly engaged with a brand tend to be more willing to say positive words (WOM).

3.3 Future Research

Research gaps allow researchers to have a glimpse of what they could develop in the near future. Table 3.8 suggests major gaps, gives examples of studies that identify them as avenues for future research and proposes research questions that could be addressed by scholars in future research. Hence, eight major gaps are highlighted.

1-Explore customer engagement in different industries. Although one may find in literature that customer engagement research has been performed in different research contexts, only 15% of the studies were performed in multiple industries. So, several studies claim that researchers should replicate the proposed models in other contexts (in different industries) to understand if it is possible to generalize the findings and if any variation occurs in different contexts.

2-Undertake a longitudinal approach. Most of the studies are a cross-sectional approach, reflecting a snapshot of customer engagement in a moment in time. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct longitudinal research to have a deeper understanding about customer engagement and a better understanding about the temporal relationship of the interrelated constructs.

3-Perform a cross-cultural analysis. Several studies also suggest that the conceptual models presented should be tested in different countries -with different cultures- to understand if the findings depend or not on cultural differences.

4-Further research about engagement valence. According to Li *et al.,* (2018), literature reveals inconsistency when addressing the topic of positive and negative engagement. The authors also point out that previous research suggest that positive and negative engagement

have been regarded to have a "black and white" relationship. Therefore, further and deeper research about actor engagement valence, its triggers, its antecedents and the relationship between the valence of engagement and engagement behaviours is required. The phenomenon of disengagement deserves more attention. Indeed, how can organizations/brands deal with such situation? Social engagement and spiritual engagement are also dimensions poorly studied that should be further developed and understood.

5-Further research about actor engagement. Recent studies have presented an evolution of the engagement topic, from a dyadic-focused (firm-customer) perspective to a network of actors, where customers, employees, providers, community members, the company, among others, play an important role (see Brodie et al., 2019). Yet, this continues to be an area for further research.

6-Explore customer engagement and customer engagement behaviours in the hospitality industry. Although the topic "engagement" has been studied within the hospitality and tourism industry, empirical research about the phenomenon is still scarce (e.g., Wei et al., 2013; So et al., 2014; Romero, 2017). Future studies using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be developed in the hospitality/tourism context to have a deeper knowledge about co-creation and customer engagement (Chathoth et al., 2016).

7-Perform deeper research about the relationship of customer engagement and other related constructs. In 2010, van Doorn et al. (2010) had already emphasized the need to study more exhaustively the antecedents of customer engagement behaviours. As time evolved, several studies have concentrated on fulfilling this need. However, more studies are still recommended. This is the case of the dichotomy experience-engagement which should be further studied (Hepola et al., 2017). Another example is Authenticity. This construct has been highly suggested as an antecedent of consumer brand engagement (Algharabat et al., 2018). Another suggestion is the concept of cynicism and how consumer´s cynicism is associated with customer engagement. Finally, the way consumers regard a certain brand as "cool or "uncool" may differently influence customer engagement (e.g. Warren et al., 2019).

8- Explore engagement-facilitating technology. Technologies have helped in the engagement process by enabling two-way interactivity (e.g., social media, and online brand communities, crowdsourcing) in real time. The advent of engagement-facilitating technologies

(e.g., virtual reality, augmented reality, smart products, Internet-of-Things-based applications, electric cars, service robots and other artificial intelligence-based technology) will affect customer engagement process and quality-of-life at the micro (e.g., individual), meso (e.g., community), and macro (e.g., societal) (e.g., Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017; Kumar et al., 2016; Loureiro et al., 2019; Ng & Wakenshaw, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2017) level. Thus, it will be interesting and relevant to understand how engagement-facilitating technologies effectively contribute to customer engagement and actor engagement. What dimensionalities of engagement should be considered? Should it be the same dimensions claimed in previous studies on customer engagement or some new? What new scales should be developed? Scholars will also be interested in increasing the knowledge about the antecedents and outcomes of using these engaging technologies.

Table 3.8- Major gaps identified within the literature (*)

Major gaps	Study	Some research questions
1.Explore customer engagement in different industries	(Chen et al., 2018); (Pansari & Kumar, 2017); (Hollebeek et al., 2017); (Bento et al., 2018); (Moliner et al., 2018); (Risitano et al., 2017); (Hollebeek, 2011a).	What are the specificities of the engagement process given the industry? Can academics use the same theory/conceptual model to capture customer engagement in different contexts?
2.Undertake a longitudinal approach	(C. Oh et al., 2017); (Islam & Rahman, 2016); (Hollebeek et al., 2014); (Brodie et al., 2011); (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2016); (Simon et al., 2016); (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014); (Leckie et al., 2016).	How does customer engagement evolve over time? What are the dimensions of customer engagement that are more relevant in long-term relationships?
3.Perform a cross-cultural analysis	(Harrigan et al., 2017); (Bento et al., 2018); (Risitano et al., 2017); (So et al., 2016); (Pansari & Kumar, 2017); (Graffigna & Gambetti, 2015); (Goldsmith et al., 2012).	Can the engagement process depend on the culture of nations? Can academics use the same theory/conceptual model to capture customer engagement in different national cultures and cultural values?
4.Further research about engagement valence	(Li et al., 2018); (Naumann et al., 2017); (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018); (So et al., 2014).	Can the relevance of the engagement dimensions depend on the valence? In which situations is the spiritual dimension more effective in the engagement process? How should firms act/react in situations of disengagement?
5.Further research about actor engagement	(Hollebeek et al., 2018); (Alexander et al., 2018); (Storbacka et al., 2016); (Fehrer et al., 2018); (Brodie et al., 2019)	How does engagement among actors emerge and evolve through the network structures? Will share engagement practices result in positive network effects? What is the role and nature of formal and informal institutions in the network? Will that role be different, depending on the size or purpose of the institution (profit/non-profit)?

Major gaps	Study	Some research questions
6. *Explore customer engagement and customer engagement behaviours in the hospitality industry*	(Romero, 2017); (So et al., 2014); (Wei et al., 2013); (Chathoth et al., 2016).	Can academics use the same theory/conceptual model to capture tourist engagement in different hospitality and tourism contexts (e.g., hotel classification, restaurant, museum, attractions and destination)? How may tourist institutions keep tourists engaged throughout the tourist journey?
7. *Perform deeper research about the relationship of customer engagement and other related constructs*	(van Doorn et al., 2010); (Hepola et al., 2017); (Algharabat et al., 2018); (So et al., 2014); (So et al., 2016); (Brodie et al., 2011); (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014); (Dwivedi, 2015).	What is the role of perceived authenticity for customers? Will it depend on the meaning of authenticity? How does customer cynicism affect customer engagement? Does the way consumers regard a certain brand (as "cool or "uncool") influence customer engagement?
8. *Explore engagement-facilitating technology*	(Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Loureiro et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2017)	What dimensionalities of engagement should be considered? What other dimensions from those regarded in past research should be analyzed? What new scales will be developed? What are the key drivers and outcomes of customers' technology-facilitated engagement? And in the case of actor engagement? Can quality of life be the ultimate outcome of these technologies? Can robots with artificial intelligence be involved in the same engagement process? And when robots perform the function of employees?

(*) This table presents some examples of studies that identify the main research gaps mentioned.

Source: Author´s elaboration

3.4 Conclusions and implications

As with any systematic review, this study has limitations, many of which are related to the review approach employed. Firstly, although the review protocol was created and clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined, as well as quality criteria, there is always a certain degree of subjectivity while choosing the relevant studies to be included in the analysis. Secondly, while the databases chosen have a wide coverage of the articles published on the topic, there is always the possibility that some relevant studies can be omitted. However, the reference check was performed to reduce this risk. Moreover, the filtering criteria adopted may have also omitted some relevant research, although we believe that the filters applied were the most suited and wide enough to include the most relevant studies. Finally, the high number of articles included in the review (144) increases the probability of human error while performing the analysis. Indeed, the inclusion of all these relevant studies in the analysis enables a

comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and leads to more solid conclusions. In spite of its limitations, this study reaches important conclusions about the topic.

As the literature review performed reveals, customer engagement seems to play a key role within the marketing field. The increasing number of studies about the topic, published in different peer-reviewed journals within the marketing, business in general and tourism and hospitality fields reflects the increasing interest of researchers on customer engagement. Indeed, the diversity of authorship (with special preponderance for scholars such as Brodie, Hollebeek, Kumar and their colleagues) and the diversity of industries and geographies where studies are taking place also show that the topic has gained importance worldwide. In what concerns the methodologies used, empirical studies have been the most common.

Although different theoretical backgrounds can be found within the studies analysed, relationship marketing and the service-dominant logic are the most common theories presented, which confirms what Islam and Rahman (2016) claimed. In what concerns the conceptual roots of engagement and its sub-forms, several definitions of engagement are presented in the marketing literature and several terms, such as "consumer engagement", "customer engagement", "brand engagement", "actor engagement" or "customer engagement behaviours" are referred. Regarding the dimensions of the construct, customer engagement is considered by many scholars a multidimensional construct, where the cognitive, affective/emotional, behavioural and social dimensions are the most frequently used. Finally, different scales - applying different engagement dimensions- have also been proposed and some of them have been identified as specific context/industry scales (e.g., scales applied specifically to the hospitality industry or for online or social media context).

Several constructs have also been identified as antecedents and/or consequences of engagement, affecting directly or indirectly customer engagement, separately or in combinations with each other. Based on the current review, there are antecedents and consequences that stand out as they have been studied in several articles. In the case of the antecedents we may point out the following as the most often studied: Experience, Involvement, Brand/ Brand-page interactivity, Satisfaction and Trust. As for the consequences, a higher number of articles employs: Loyalty, Firm Performance, Word of Mouth (WOM), Satisfaction and Trust.

Although the research about customer engagement is recent- as articles about the topic have mainly emerged after 2005- the high proliferation of studies about this theme in the last years indicates that this will continue to be a very relevant area of research in the future. The importance of the topic justifies what seems to be a path to the creation of a specific engagement

theory. In fact, although relationship marketing and the service-dominant logic are the most common foundations found in the analysed studies, a customer engagement theory seems to be emerging. The complexity of the topic associated to the lack of consensus around the conceptualizations presented, to the different scales to measure the construct and to the different contexts and actors involved in the process, justify the importance of finding the common ground among the different perspectives presented in the literature. Firstly, despite the number of definitions presented, we can claim that customer engagement is perceived by many scholars as the connection (being it through behavioural manifestations, state of mind…) established between the customer/ consumer and a focal object (a firm or a brand) that goes beyond the purchase. Secondly, most of the authors describe the concept as multidimensional. The multidimensionality of the construct combined with the characteristics of the current new marketing era- where social media and technology play a key role- underline the importance of more future research about the social dimension of the construct. This dimension is, in fact, based on the interaction, the dialogue or the sharing of comments between customers and the firm, between customers and other customers or between other actors in the network (Hollebeek, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012).

Another characteristic that seems to emerge is that customer engagement is a global concept (Gupta et al., 2018), for two main reasons. First, the global interest on the topic reflected on the diversity of authors studying the subject and the diversity of industries and countries where the studies about customer engagement are taking place. Second, the perception that customer engagement behaviours, such as Word of Mouth (positive or negative), giving recommendations or writing reviews (van Doorn et al., 2010) can have a global impact, facilitated by social media and technology (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; So et al., 2016).

The different measurement scales presented in the literature (many of them are industry specific) present a challenge to future research, as two scenarios may occur in the future. In a first scenario, new studies can appear continuing the trend to develop scales for specific contexts and industries. The other scenario is the appearance of new studies that try to create a global scale, able to be applied in different geographies and industries.

Exploring customer engagement in different industries can also help to understand the specificities of the engagement process depending on the context and can also help to understand the possibility to apply the same conceptual model to different industries. Concerning the longitudinal approach proposed, we suggest, for example, to identify the dimensions of customer engagement that are more relevant to maintain long-term relationships. Considering cross-cultural studies, we recommend analysing how the engagement process

works on different cultures. In addition, the current study strongly suggests exploring other constructs that may be related to customer and actor engagement, such as customer cynicism and/or how the perception of how a brand is perceived as "cool" may influence the process of engagement.

All these suggestions may provide the basis for the research efforts that can make a substantial contribution to developing the topic and provide (in the future) a more holistic understanding of the nature of engagement in the marketing filed. Although Islam and Rahman's (2016) study is a very valuable literature review, where the main results are confirmed in this study, here other insights are provided, such as: authorship, main research contexts, extension and strengthening of the gaps found, as well as other research questions to be addressed in the future.

As major theoretical contributions, this literature review has i) mapped the past and identified major topics from the past and ii) highlighted eight major gaps that future research should resolve with regard to the following focus: explore customer engagement in different industries, undertake a longitudinal approach, perform a cross-cultural analysis, further research about engagement valence and actor engagement, explore customer engagement and customer engagement behaviours in the hospitality setting, perform deeper research about the relationship of customer engagement and other related constructs and explore engagement-facilitating technology. Particularly, when analysing more recent studies, some trends seem to emerge: the need to focus on the engagement among different actors in the network (e.g. Fehrer et al., 2018; Hollebeek, 2018) and on engagement valence (Li et al., 2018). For instance, future areas to focus on can be how engagement among actors evolve through the network structure or how firms should deal with situations of disengagement.

Concerning practical implications, the systematic review will assist marketers in understanding major links between drivers and outcomes of customer engagement, which will help them to prepare marketing strategies. In what concerns the antecedents of engagement, marketers and managers should be aware that in order to achieve engagement, brands might need to achieve some goals before. For instance, firms need to ensure that consumers have a positive experience with the brand, are satisfied and trust the brand.

Marketers will also benefit from acknowledging the existence of scales to measure customer engagement and eventually apply them in their surveys. Hence, knowing the scales and the different dimensions involved in customer engagement can be very useful for marketers who apply these scales to their brands, as they will be able to understand the relevance of each dimension of customer engagement and act upon it. For instance, if a brand manager

understands that consumers are more engaged in a cognitive way, he/she can develop tactics to stimulate more the emotional dimension so that consumers feel more enthusiastic and passionate about the brand. Another relevant aspect is to be aware of the role of the different actors within the engagement process, as this will enable marketers to develop different engagement tactics to target different actors in the network.

Although many marketers already measure brand engagement on social media based on specific KPIs, this literature review will help them to have a more holistic understanding of the topic, highlighting the main definitions associated to the construct, the theoretical background, the conceptual roots, the dimensions, as well as the antecedents and outcomes.

Finally, the current study sheds light on past research on the topic, in a structured and consolidated way. At the same time, it opens major avenues for scholars to read and reflect on, to continue the process of understanding the "engagement" in the marketing field.

CHAPTER 4

4. Study Two- Systematic literature review Brand Authenticity

The purpose of the current study (Study Two) is to systematically review and critically analyze the research about brand authenticity. This study maps the past, structures the existing knowledge about brand authenticity and points out avenues for the future. The most relevant articles are selected and analysed. Based on the identified articles, this study will: (i) analyze the publication years of the articles, as well as the scientific journals where they have been published and the main authors studying the topic, (ii) describe the methodologies that have been applied, (iii) identify the countries where the studies took place, (iv) describe the type of market/ industries analyzed more frequently, (v) identify the theoretical perspectives explored in the literature and the nature of the concept, (vi) highlight the different concept definitions present in the literature, (vii) highlight the most relevant dimensions and measurement scales, (viii) identify the main relationships that are being established between the constructs and (ix) synthetize the main research gaps and avenues for future research.

4.1 Planning and conducting the review

The current systematic review aims to answer to the following question: "What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?". To identify the main articles related to the analyzed topic, two important academic databases are used: Web of Science and Scopus. These databases include peer-reviewed articles, published in high quality journals, providing a wide coverage of the topic. The inclusion of articles from peer-reviewed journals has also been performed in other systematic reviews (e.g., Christofi et al., 2021; Leonidou et al., 2020; Vrontis & Christofi, 2021). The search for this study was done in July 2020 and the keywords used were: "Brand" AND "Authentic*". Firstly, the keywords "Brand authenticity" were chosen. However, we realized that the number of articles found was very limited and that significant articles were not being included. Hence, we decided to use "Brand" AND "Authentic*" as it seemed the most suited combination to find relevant studies about the topic. The inclusion and exclusion criteria have been defined by the researchers, based on Macpherson and Holt (2007) (see Table 4.1). Following other systematic reviews, the research performed is not limited to a specific

timeframe (e.g., Christofi et al., 2021; Leonidou et al., 2020) to include all relevant studies from any given publication period.

In Web of Science, the search is done within the core collection and articles are identified using the specific keywords in the "Topic". The type of documents analyzed are articles and reviews and the Web of Science categories used are: business; management; hospitality, leisure, sport & tourism; communication; ethics; psychology applied; psychology multidisciplinary and psychology experimental. All these categories are included, so that a holistic view of the construct can be obtained. The Quartile of the Journal is also used as a filter, as only articles of journals listed in JCR 2019 in the Quartiles Q1, Q2 or Q3, are included in the analysis. In Scopus, the search is done introducing the keywords in the "article title, abstract, keywords". The subject areas are limited to "Business, Management and Accounting", "Social Sciences" and "Psychology". The document type searched are articles and reviews, in English. To select the articles to analyze, the Scimago (SJR 2019) ranking is applied and only articles included in journals placed in Q1, Q2 or Q3 are selected.

From the Web of Science electronic database, a total of 470 articles are identified with the keywords "Brand" AND "Authentic*". From these, only the articles that belong to journals placed in Q1, Q2 or Q3 in JCR2019 are included, which leads to 318 final articles. From the Scopus database, the number of articles identified with the keywords "Brand" AND "Authentic*" are 623. From these, only the papers that are placed in journals ranked in Q1, Q2 or Q3 from Scimago 2019 (SJR 2019) are included, which leads to a total of 394 articles. When we put together the selected articles from both databases and exclude the duplicated articles (when the same article was in both databases), this leads to a total of 517 papers. At this stage, abstracts are analyzed by the researchers, based on the quality criteria defined for the study. The main criteria are adjusted from other studies (Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2004) (see Table 4.2). After reading the abstracts and applying the quality criteria, 170 papers remain. The full text reading leads a final number of 111 papers to be finally included in the systematic review. However, after reading the reference lists of several articles, we realize that some key articles and books about the topic have not been included in the scope of the systematic review, due to the inclusion criteria applied. This happens mainly because the missed key articles do not have the keyword "brand", either in the "Topic", or in the "article title, abstract, keywords". Thus, they did not appear in the systematic search. However, as these articles are important to understand the context of authenticity in a more holistic perspective, as this concept is studied in different areas of knowledge, these articles are also included in the analysis. There are also some important books about the concept that have also been included

in the analysis. Hence, to the 111 articles that come out from the systematic search, 19 additional articles and 3 books/book chapters are added and included in this study. At this stage, data are extracted from the selected articles (e.g., article title, scientific journal, authors, publication year, methodology, industry, country, brand authenticity definition, brand authenticity dimensions, scales used, main objective of the study, main constructs associated, conclusions, future research, among others) and the analysis is performed.

Table 4.1- Article selection: inclusion criteria

Criteria	Filters - Screening Process	No. Articles identified
Electronic database: Web of Science (core collection)		
Topic	**"Brand" AND "Authentic*"**	
Categories	Business; Management; Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism; Communication; Ethics; Psychology applied; Psychology multidisciplinary; Psychology experimental	470
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Total articles included in JCR 2019 Q1, Q2 or Q3		318
Electronic database: Scopus		
Article Title, Abstract, Keywords	**"Brand" AND "Authentic*"**	
Subject Area	Business, Management & Accounting; Social Sciences; Psychology	623
Source Type	Articles and Reviews	
Language	English	
Total articles included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 in the ranking of Scimago (SJR 2019)		394

Criteria	Filters - Screening Process	No. Articles identified
Electronic databases: Web of Science + Scopus		
Total articles from Web of Science and Scopus, excluding duplicated articles (when the same article is in both databases) and included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 (JCR 2019 and SJR 2019)		517
Total articles included in the analysis, after abstract reading		170
Total articles included in the analysis, after full text reading		111
Articles and Books/ Book chapters included after the systematic search was done		
Articles added afterwards		19
Books/ Book chapters added afterwards		3
Total articles included in the analysis		**130**
Total articles and books/ book chapters included in the analysis		133

Source: Author´s elaboration

Table 4.2- Quality criteria

Criterion	0: Absence	1: Low level	2: Medium level	3: High level	Not Applicable
1. Directly related to the construct(s) analyzed in the current study	The article does not provide enough information to evaluate this criterion	Not related	Somehow related	Totally related	Not Applicable
2. Theory robustness	The article does not provide enough information to evaluate this criterion	Weak development of literature	Superficial development of theories and constructs within existing literature	Solid use of theory	Not Applicable
3. Theory, methodology and findings	The article does not provide enough information to evaluate this criterion	Incomplete data and not related to theory	Data not totally related to the arguments	Strong alignment between the arguments presented and data	Not Applicable
4. Contributions to theory and/or practice	The article does not provide enough information to evaluate this criterion	Makes a low contribution	Makes a medium contribution	Makes a high contribution	Not Applicable

Source: Author´s elaboration, adapted from Pittaway et al. (2004) and Macpherson and Holt (2007).

4.2 Findings

Publication Year

From the 130 articles analyzed (111 resulting from the systematic search and 19 added afterwards) and although no time constrain has been included as a filter, it is possible to state that 80% of the articles have been published between 2012 and 2020, as it is shown in Figure 4.1. This means that the topic has been attracting researchers and gaining relevance over the years and, more specifically, in the last decade.

Figure 4.1- Articles published by year
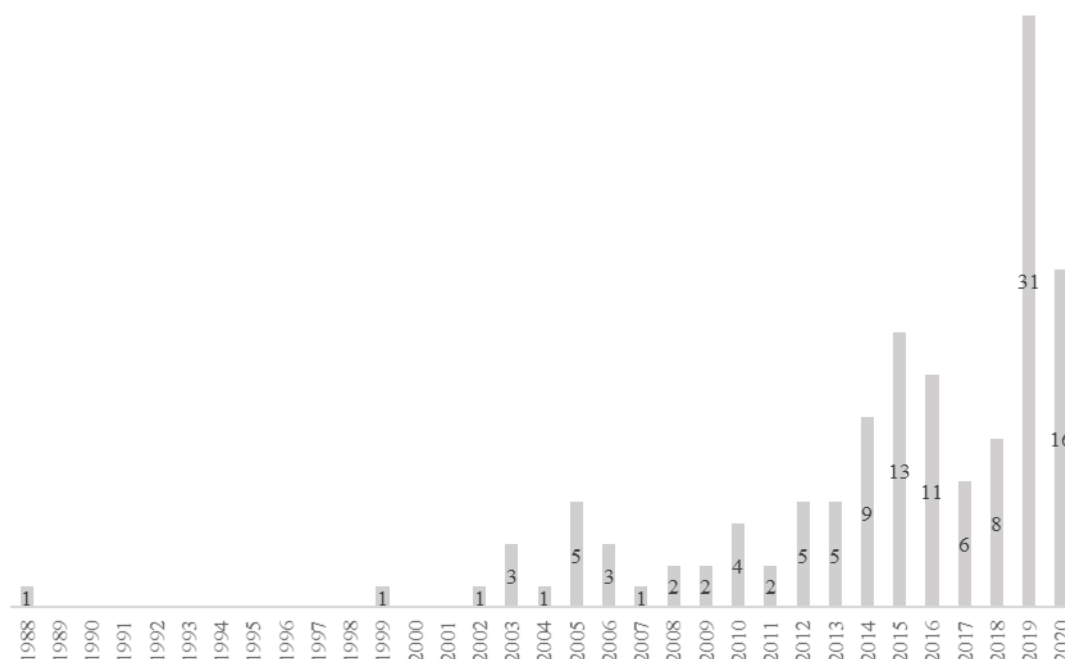
Note: The search was done in July 2020, therefore, it does not include the entire year of 2020.

Source: Author´s elaboration

Scientific journals, authorship and study location

The articles analyzed have been published in 62 different journals. However, 73% of the articles within the analysis have been published in 27 scientific journals (see Table 4.3). Journal of Business Research, Annals of Tourism Research and Journal of Brand Management are the top journals with articles published about the topic (8, 7 and 7, respectively). The wide number of journals, from different fields, publishing studies related to the subject highlights the cross-disciplinary focus of this theme. In fact, these scientific journals cover different fields, namely, marketing, international business, strategy, management, tourism and hospitality, psychology and communication.

Authors seem to work in a collaborative way. Indeed, within the analysis performed, 83% of the articles have been developed by two or more authors. Specifically, 32% of the articles have been published by two authors, 29% by three authors, 17% by four authors, 5% by five authors and 1% by six authors. In Table 4.4 are included the authors who have participated in two or more of the studies, included in the review conducted.

In terms of the geographical coverage of the empirical studies, research shows that the topic has been studied around the globe, with a strong focus on Europe and America, being the USA

the most represented country, as it can be observed in Table 4.5. The country classification/ study location is based on the place where the empirical study is performed, where the data are collected and/or nationalities/country of residence of participants. In the case of studies where this is not applicable, for instance, for conceptual studies or literature reviews, the classification given is N.A (Not Applicable). In the case of studies that do not identify the place where the empirical study is performed, the classification given is "Undisclosed". It is defined as "Multiple" when data are collected in three or more countries. From the 130 articles analyzed, the top countries with articles published on the topic are the USA, in America, Germany and France, in Europe, Australia in Oceania and China in Asia. Africa is the least represented continent, meaning that future research should be encouraged in this region. The findings also suggest that empirical studies in multiple locations should also be fostered.

Table 4.3- Scientific Journals (Top 27)

Scientific Journal	Study count	% of Total
Journal of Business Research	8	6%
Annals of Tourism Research	7	5%
Journal of Brand Management	7	5%
Journal of Product and Brand Management	6	5%
European Journal of Marketing	6	5%
Tourism Management	5	4%
Psychology and Marketing	5	4%
Journal of Marketing	4	3%
International Journal of Hospitality Management	4	3%
Journal of Consumer Research	4	3%
Journal of Marketing Management	4	3%
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	3	2%
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	3	2%
Journal of Advertising	3	2%
International Marketing Review	2	2%
International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management	2	2%
British Food Journal	2	2%
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2	2%
Journal of Consumer Behaviour	2	2%
Journal of Travel Research	2	2%
Journal of Consumer Psychology	2	2%
Service Industries Journal	2	2%
Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising	2	2%
Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	2	2%
Journal of Management Studies	2	2%
Journal of Marketing Research	2	2%
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2	2%
Sub-Total	**95**	**73%**
Other Journals	**35**	**27%**
TOTAL	**130**	**100%**

Source: Author´s elaboration

Table 4.4- Brand authenticity research authors (with two or more studies included in the analysis)

Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count	Author	Study Count
Beverland, MB	7	Webster, CM	2	Mattila, AS	2	Wiedmann, K.-P	2
Guevremont, A	4	Dickinson, SJ	2	Hanks, L	2	Liu, MJ	2
Grohmann, B	3	Mody, M	2	Moulard, JG	2	del Barrio-Garcia, S	2
Akbar, M.M	3	Farrelly, F	2	Hennigs, N	2	Loureiro, S.M.C	2
Wymer, W	3	Ostillio, M.C	2	Newman, GE	2	Zhou, Z	2
Ilicic, J	3	Bruhn, M	2	Childs, M	2	Kim, S	2
Napoli, J	2	Woo, H	2	Schoenmüller, V	2	Kovács, B	2
Manthiou, A	2	Chhabra, D	2	Zhou, N	2		

Source: Author´s elaboration

Table 4.5- Geographical distribution of articles

Continent	Country/ Location	Study count	% of Total	Continent	Country/ Location	Study count	% of Total
America	USA	23	18%	Asia	China	5	4%
	USA, Canada	2	2%		South Korea	4	3%
	USA, Brasil	1	1%		Taiwan	3	2%
	Multiple	1	1%		India	2	2%
	Canada	1	1%		China, Japan	1	1%
America Total		**28**	**22%**		Vietnam	1	1%
Europe	France	5	4%		Bangladesh	1	1%
	Germany	5	4%	**Asia Total**		**17**	**13%**
	Multiple	3	2%	Oceania	Australia	10	8%
	United Kingdom	2	2%		New Zealand	2	2%
	Spain	2	2%	**Oceania Total**		**12**	**9%**
	Greece	2	2%	Africa	South Africa	1	1%
	Italy	2	2%	**Africa Total**		**1**	**1%**
	Finland	1	1%	Multiple	Multiple	11	8%
	United Kingdom, Italy	1	1%		USA, United Kingdom	1	1%
	Austria	1	1%		USA, South Korea	1	1%
	Belgium, Netherlands	1	1%	**Multiple Total**		**13**	**10%**
	Slovenia	1	1%	**Undisclosed Total**		**17**	**13%**
	Netherlands	1	1%	**N.A Total**		**14**	**11%**
	Romania	1	1%				
Europe Total		**28**	**22%**	**Total**		**130**	**100%**

Source: Author´s elaboration

Research context (industries analyzed) and methodology applied

The research context relates to the markets/ industries in which the empirical study is developed. In the current study, a wide diversity of industries is represented (see Table 4.6). Food and beverages, Tourism (includes markets, festivals, tourist destinations and tourist attractions, among others) and Food services (restaurants and coffee shops) are the most represented industries with 9%, 8% and 8% of the analyzed studies, respectively. Twenty-four

percent of the studies included in the review address two or more industries (Multiple industries). Two percent do not disclose the industry where the study is developed (Undisclosed) and in 10% of the studies this classification is not applicable (N.A), for example, as in the case of conceptual studies or literature reviews.

Food and beverages are well represented among the studies included in this systematic review of the literature (e.g., Alexander, 2009; Assiouras et al., 2015; Beverland et al., 2008; Carsana & Jolibert, 2018; Gundlach & Neville, 2012; Orth & Gal, 2014). While some studies focus on manufacturer´s brands, others apply the concept of authenticity to Terroir Brands and Private labels, stating that authenticity is not restrained to manufacturers´ brands (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018) . In the current review, the Tourism sector also stands out. The tourism studies included refer mainly to the concept of tourism authenticity applied to destination sites, attractions and places (e.g., Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Chhabra et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Rather et al., 2019; Spielmann et al., 2018). In the case of food services, this category includes both coffeeshops (e.g., Aiello & Dickinson, 2014; Moulard et al., 2016) and restaurants (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Wang & Mattila, 2015). In the concrete case of restaurants, the concept of authenticity applied to ethnic restaurants is a commonly studied topic (e.g. Lu et al., 2015; Phung et al., 2019)

In what concerns the luxury industry, 6% of the studies included in the review address the luxury context- wines, perfumes, apparel, textile, watches, among others (e.g., Beverland, 2006; Beverland & Luxton, 2005; Cheah et al., 2016; Collins & Weiss, 2015; Sjostrom et al., 2016; Turunen & Laaksonen, 2011). This could be explained by the fact that different authors identify authenticity as one key attribute of luxury goods, luxury services and luxury experiences (e.g. Manthiou et al., 2018; Sjostrom et al., 2016). Within the luxury context, another topic that comes out is the difference between luxury products and its counterfeits as the authenticity of the luxury products has been considered a key element to differentiate the genuine product from its counterfeits (e.g., Turunen & Laaksonen, 2011). It is also important to underline the role that corporate museums can have for some luxury brands, acting as a vehicle to enhance brand authenticity perceptions (Bertoli et al., 2016; Carù et al., 2017). In the case of Fashion and apparel, this market represents 6% of the analyzed studies. This review includes articles that are applied to the context of fashion (in general) and also sports apparel (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2016; Oh et al., 2019).

Table 4.6- Research context

Industries covered in studies	Study count	% of Total
Food & Beverages	12	9%
Tourism (****)	11	8%
Food services (**)	11	8%
Luxury (***)	8	6%
Fashion & Apparel	8	6%
Accommodation(*)	7	5%
Entertainment	5	4%
Art & Culture	4	3%
Cosmetics & Perfumes	3	2%
Online services	2	2%
Cars	2	2%
FMCG	2	2%
Government & NGO	2	2%
Sports	1	1%
Merchandising	1	1%
Transportation	1	1%
Services (general)	1	1%
Financial Services	1	1%
Multiple industries	31	24%
Multiple services	1	1%
N.A	13	10%
Undisclosed	3	2%
Total	**130**	**100%**

(*) Accommodation includes hotels, Airbnb, guesthouses and resorts, among others.
(**) Food services include restaurants and coffee shops.
(***) Luxury includes luxury apparel, luxury textile, luxury wines, luxury perfumes and luxury watches, among others.
(****) Tourism includes markets, festivals, tourist destinations and tourist attractions, among others.
Source: Author´s elaboration

The articles analyzed on the brand authenticity topic are mainly empirical (90%) (see Figure 4.2). In this review, empirical articles are the studies with empirical data, using whether quantitative, qualitative or mix-approach methodologies. Literature reviews present a review of the main literature so far, with no empirical data and do not present a conceptual framework, while conceptual studies are the ones with no empirical data and present a conceptual framework. Within the empirical articles, empirical quantitative studies are the majority, representing 48% of the works analyzed. Hence, future research could focus more on a mix-approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data, as a way to have a deeper understanding of the brand authenticity phenomenon. Figure 4.3 shows an

evolution, along the years, of the methodologies applied in the analyzed articles, confirming that the major concentration of articles about the topic have been published between 2012 and 2020 and highlighting the predominance of empirical studies.

Figure 4.2- Methodologies used
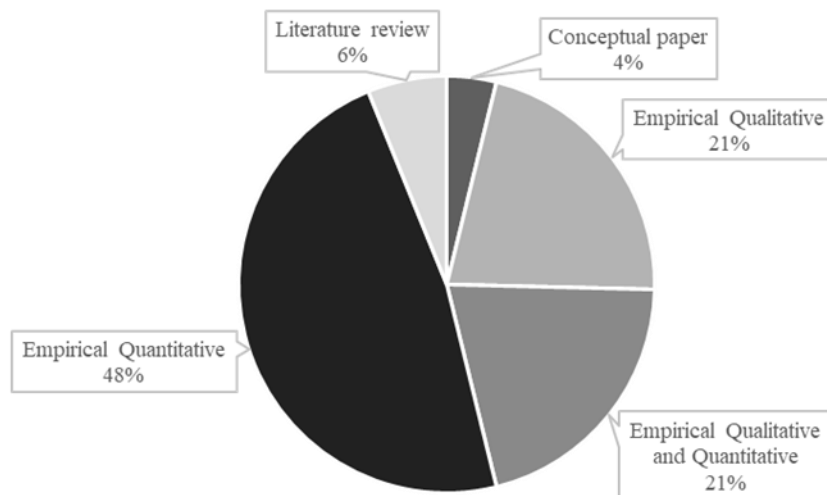
Source: Author´s elaboration

Figure 4.3- Methodologies applied throughout the years
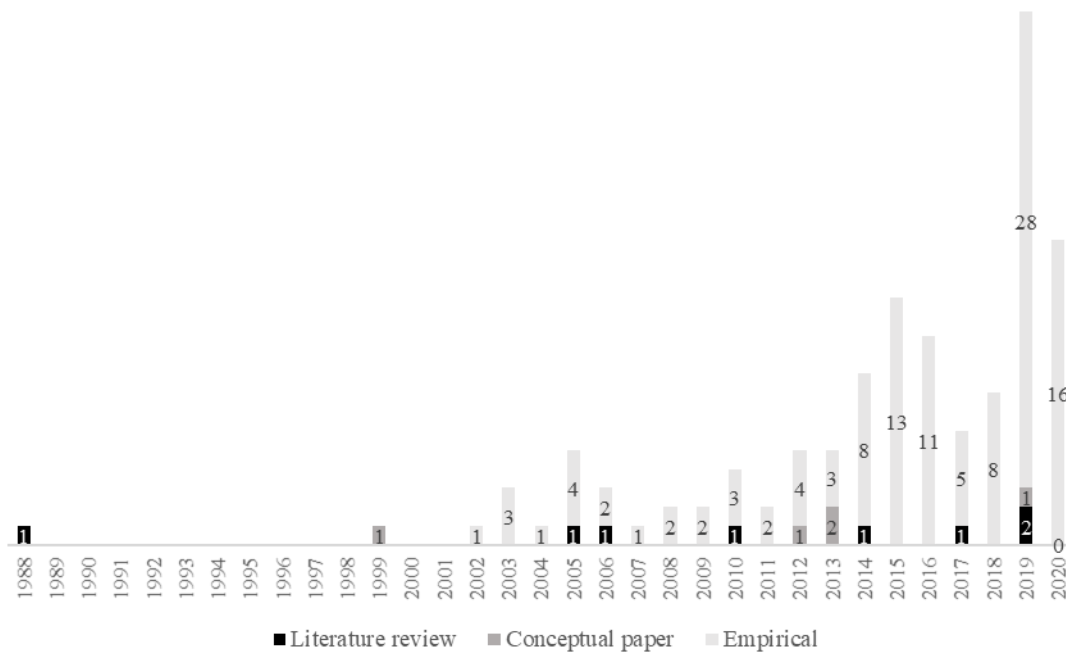
Note: The search was done in July 2020, therefore, it does not include the 2020 Full Year.

Source: Author´s elaboration

Theoretical perspectives and the nature of authenticity

Due to its role in contemporary culture, authenticity has been studied in different research fields (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Within the marketing literature, the study of authenticity, its definition and nature has been very fragmented and the term used in different ways (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Morhart et al., 2015). In any case, the definitions presented by Fine (2003) who associates the concept with sincerity, innocence, originality and genuineness and by Grayson and Martinec (2004) who state that the word "authentic" has often been used to describe something that is genuine and true and also describe an authentic object as something that is believed to be "the original" or "the real thing", are referred by several authors (e.g., Beverland & Luxton, 2005; Chiu et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2019; Guèvremont, 2018; Moulard et al., 2016).

Different theoretical perspectives of authenticity have been presented within marketing research. Grayson and Martinec (2014) use Peirce´s semiotic framework applied to the tourism context to present two kinds of authenticity related to a market offering (any product, service or experience evaluated by a consumer). These two types of authenticity are indexical and iconic authenticity. Indexicality identifies the "real thing" and distinguishes it from its copies. This distinction is possible due to the existence of cues that are perceived to have a factual and spatio-temporal link with what is being claimed, for instance, a certification. Iconic authenticity is found in market offerings that are "'perceived as being similar to something else'" (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298) or, in other words, when an object is a correct reproduction of the original. Like in the case of indexical cues, iconic cues are also very important for consumers to identify something as being authentic. Leigh et al. (2006) analyze the different forms of authenticity related to the object, the community and the self in a consumption context, on their study within the cars´ industry (MG owners). In this article, three types of authenticity are highlighted: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. Firstly, objective authenticity assumes that there is an objective criterion to judge the genuineness of objects and/or experiences. This objective authenticity is associated to Grayson and Martinec´s (2004) view of indexical authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006; Morhart et al., 2015). Morhart et al. (2015) also reinforce this idea, stating that authenticity is a quality that belongs to an object and that can be evaluated by experts. Therefore, in a context of a brand, cues like labels of origin, ingredients or performance are used by consumers to assess authenticity.

Secondly, the constructive authenticity is seen as a quality perceived by consumers that emerges from personal views which "allows for different interpretations of reality on the basis of consumers´ projections onto objects and is essentially symbolic" (Leigh et al., 2006, p. 483).

This perspective assumes that it is a socially constructed phenomenon, a projection of one´s own expectations, preferences, beliefs (Wang, 1999). In this vein, another study states that "authenticity is a socially constructed concept, and its social connotation is not given, but 'negotiable'" (Cohen, 1988, p. 378). This perspective is associated with Grayson and Martinec´s view of iconic authenticity (Leigh, et al., 2006; Morhart et al., 2015). Thirdly, existential authenticity is related to the consumers´ search for their authentic selves (Leigh et al., 2006) and it "advances the notion that authenticity means being true to one´s self" (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 202). "In a branding context, existential brand cues refer to self-referential aspects of a brand in consumer-brand relationships" (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 207). According to Wang (1999) who considers that this is the perspective that better explains the authenticity concept in tourism, two different dimensions are included in the existential authenticity: intra-personal authenticity, which is centered on the individual self, involving feelings like, for instance, entertainment, relaxation or self-realization and inter-personal authenticity which is related to sharing and communicating the pleasure and enjoyment of experiences with others.

Other types of authenticity are presented by Beverland et al. (2008). The findings of the study point out to three different types of authenticity which are: pure (literal), approximate and moral authenticity. Pure authenticity provides consumers "with in situ guarantee of the genuine article" (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 8) and, for this, indexical cues are used. Approximate authenticity provides consumers with "a feeling that this brand will help achieve self-authentication through connecting with place and time" (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 8) . In this case, iconic cues are used to create a perception of connection to the past. Finally, moral authenticity provides consumers "with a feeling that this brand will help achieve self-authentication through connecting with personal moral values" (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 8), which is usually supported by indexical or iconic images.

In the hospitality and tourism literature, the quest for authentic experiences is considered one of the key trends and a very important force that drives tourists to travel to distant places and times (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). The authors identify key types of authenticity in tourism consumption: object-based and existential. Object-based authenticity is defined as the "desire to visit and see original sites/artifacts, purchase souvenirs" to have "experience, knowledge and enjoyment in genuine objects, arts and crafts" and existential authenticity is the "interest in escaping everyday life and mass tourism, getting in touch with true self, self actualization" to achieve a "sense of enjoyment and escape, experience of true self in the context of a foreign place, time and culture" (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010, p. 655). Although recognizing the importance of authenticity in the hospitality and tourism context, Kolar and Zabkar (2010) also consider

that, in the literature, there is fragmentation of the authenticity construct that is translated in different descriptions, conceptualizations and interpretations. Adding to this, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) also agree that there is a very strong lack of consensus around the topic and that it is not possible to find a common ground among the different perspectives. However, although different theoretical views are presented, from the literature review performed, one can realize that the authenticity concept within tourism and hospitality literature is being organized around three main perspectives: objectivist, constructivist and postmodern (Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Lu et al., 2015; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The objective/ modernist approach states that "Authenticity is an attribute of an object" (Castéran & Roederer, 2013, p. 154) and that authenticity can be judged based on objective standards (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Lu et al., 2015), which is in line with the definition presented by Leigh et al. (2006). The objectivist perspective is sometimes associated to another concept which is "staged authenticity" (MacCannell, 1973). While the authenticity of products and experiences can be determined by experts, consumers may not be able to distinguish between true authenticity and "staged authenticity" (Lu et al., 2015; MacCannell, 1973). However, staged authenticity has also been analyzed in a festival context and the study reveals that, even when the event is staged far away from the origin, authenticity can still be achieved, meaning that "staged" is not a synonym of inauthenticity or superficiality as it can have elements of the original tradition (Chhabra et al., 2003).

In what concerns the constructivist approach, it perceives authenticity as "a social construct and the result of a perceptual process of interpretation" (Castéran & Roederer, 2013, p. 154). This is also in line with the definition of Leigh et al. (2006). An example where this perspective is assumed is in the work of Peterson (2005) who highlights that "authenticity is constructed and subject to continual change" (Peterson, 2005, p. 1086). The postmodern perspective assumes that consumers do not judge authenticity based on objective criteria but on their emotional experiences (Keiningham et al., 2019; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Lu et al., 2015). Lu et al. (2015) analyze authenticity perceptions in the context of ethnic restaurants and state that "customers will still perceive a restaurant as authentic if what they see, what they eat and how they feel are concurrent with their desired emotions and experiences" (Lu et al., 2015, p. 37). This has led some authors to the conclusion that postmodernists argue that authenticity is not relevant for tourists who do not value it and see it in a cynical way (Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). However, Kolar and Zabkar (2010) claim that this statement is "problematic" and can be "misleading".

Authenticity sub-forms and Brand authenticity: main definitions

Fritz et al. (2017), present definitions of authenticity in different fields of research. In the philosophy area, authenticity is associated with moral behavior and, within sociology, the constructivist perspective is well accepted, assuming that the concept is, mainly, a social construction. Concerning anthropology, authenticity is linked to the preservation of beliefs, values and cultural norms and, in the field of psychology, "authenticity is rooted in subjective internal experiences that have implications for one´s self-knowledge, understanding and relationship behaviour" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 326).

Within marketing literature and based on the review performed, it can be stated that many studies can be organized around different streams of research. Firstly, two important streams of research can be highlighted: authenticity as an attribute of a subject (for instance, employees´ emotional authenticity) and authenticity as an attribute of an object (e.g. brand authenticity) (Fritz et al., 2017). Beverland and Farrelly (2010) add to this view when stating that authenticity can be found in objects, brands and consumption experiences. Other streams of research in the marketing literature are: authenticity seen from the brand manager´s perspective and from the consumer´s perspective (Oh et al., 2019). There are also authors that present the authenticity construct seen from the perspective of the vendor and others for whom authenticity has to focus on the perception of consumers (Gundlach & Neville, 2012). However, the consumers´ perspective of authenticity is more common in the literature than the vendor´s perspective (Chhabra, 2005).

Several authenticity and brand authenticity definitions have, in fact, been found in literature, as well as many authenticity sub-forms. A key objective of this systematic review is to identify, on the one hand, what is a common ground of understanding among researchers and, on the other hand, what are the definitions that have been mostly referred among the different studies analyzed. Hence, the analysis has led us to the conclusion that despite the different definitions and terms used to describe authenticity, what seems to be transversal across different authors is that authenticity is associated with being genuine, real and true, which totally supports what is stated by Beverland and Farrelly (2010). Taking into account the definitions found in the literature, we address, firstly, to the study of Beverland and Luxton (2005), who decide to base their work on the definition of Fine (2003) from sociology. Fine (2003) assumes that authenticity is linked to the perception that something is "sincere, innocent, original, genuine, and unaffected, distinct from strategic and pragmatic self-presentation" (Fine, 2003, p. 155). Another article, presented by Schallehn et al. (2014) define authenticity based on a socio-psychological approach and state that it is "the degree to which personal identity is

causally linked to individual behaviour" (Schallehn et al., 2014, p. 193). A common way that seems to be used by researchers to define authenticity is to identify elements/ attributes that an object, a subject or an experience need to have, in order to be considered authentic. Beverland (2005) identifies elements that are inherent to the product like the production process and/or links to place and historic style and other subjective elements like, for instance, myths and status classifications. Beverland (2006) identifies six attributes (objective and subjective) associated with authenticity: heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial motives. Choi et al. (2015), focusing on fashion brand authenticity, consider that the construct is composed by seven factors: authority, fashionability, consistency, innovativeness, sustainability, origin, and heritage.

When the concept of authenticity is applied to a brand, the construct of brand authenticity appears. However, in line with what happens with authenticity, the literature review also reveals that there are several definitions for the brand authenticity construct. Bruhn et al. (2012) conclude that brand authenticity is applied to objects and services, based on the individuals´ perceptions and on the attributes of the brand and that these attributes can vary. Morhart et al. (2015) relate brand authenticity to the consumers´ perception that a brand is faithful and true towards consumers and itself, also helping consumers to be true to themselves. Another widely referred definition is presented by Napoli et al. (2014) who state that brand authenticity is based on the consumer subjective evaluation of the genuineness of a brand. Fritz et al. (2017) consider that a brand is authentic when its behaviors are consistent and reflect the core values, the essence and the norms of the brand. The perspective presented by Dwivedi and McDonald (2018) is very similar to the one of Fritz et al. (2017), also stating that an authentic brand is one that is true to itself, knows what it stands for and keeps its promise. Another perspective of the concept associates brand authenticity to the person´s behaviors, stating that these behaviors should be motivated by real feelings and thoughts (Moulard et al., 2016). Hence, Moulard et al. (2016) defend that brand authenticity exists when consumers perceive that brand managers are motivated and passionate to deliver their products.

Other sub-forms of authenticity still related with brands and explored in the literature are the concept of co-branding authenticity which is considered to be present when a consumer perceives the genuineness of a co-branding partnership (Ilicic et al., 2019) and the concept of brand extension authenticity that "represents a consumer's sense that a brand extension is a legitimate, culturally consistent extension of the parent brand" (Spiggle et al., 2012, p. 968). In the context of communication, authenticity also appears associated with brand stories.

Therefore, some authors define authenticity as the perceptions that readers obtain from materials that make them believe that the story is real (Chiu et al., 2012). Within this context, Ad authenticity has been defined as one that is true, real and genuine, based on the executional elements or dimensions that are applied (Becker et al., 2019). The conclusions of the study developed by Beverland et al. (2008) reinforce the importance that advertising has on providing images of authenticity. Beverland and Luxton (2005), when analyzing Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), conclude that it is very important that the message to be communicated is based on attributes associated to authenticity and that it is demonstrated by the product performance.

When authenticity is applied to people, the concepts of celebrity authenticity and employee authenticity emerge from the literature. Celebrity brand authenticity has been applied when celebrities are analyzed as brands and it is many times associated to the perception that the celebrity is being true to himself/ herself (Ilicic & Webster, 2016), which means that he/she is behaving accordingly to his/ her true self (Moulard et al., 2015). Regarding employee authenticity, in a study applied to the service context, the authors describe the importance of aligning employee behavior with brand positioning in branded service encounters (Sirianni et al., 2013).

Within tourism research, authenticity has also been found to describe places (e.g. Rather et al., 2019; Spielmann et al., 2018). In these cases, the construct of place authenticity is applied and related to the genuineness of a tourist destination (Rather et al., 2019). Table 4.7 presents a summary of definitions found in the literature, of the main concepts associated to authenticity, its sub-forms and, specifically, brand authenticity.

Besides the authenticity sub-forms described, two important highlights come from the literature review. Firstly, the reference to the existence of a brand´s aura. Sometimes, when authors describe the required attributes for a brand to be considered authentic, some address to what is defined as the "brand aura" that helps to build the perception of authenticity, differentiating it from other brands, showing its commitment to specific values and, many times, transmitting the idea that it is above commercial considerations (Alexander, 2009; Beverland, 2005; Brown et al., 2003). Secondly, another important highlight is that, although in the majority of the articles, the topic is treated as a "black" or "white" concept because an object, service or experience is considered authentic or inauthentic, some authors do consider authenticity as a continuum (Gundlach & Neville, 2012; Napoli et al., 2016).

Table 4.7- Authenticity, sub-forms and brand authenticity: main definitions from selected studies

Author (s)	Research Type	Construct	Definition
(Beverland & Farrelly, 2010, p. 839)	Empirical Qualitative	Authenticity	"Significantly, despite the multiplicity of terms and interpretations applied to authenticity, ultimately what is consistent across the literature is that authenticity encapsulates what is genuine, real, and/or true (Arnould and Price 2000; Bendix 1992; Berger 1973; Costa and Bamossy 1995; Thompson et al. 2006)."
(Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 567)	Empirical Qualitative and Quantitative	Brand authenticity	"(1) Authenticity in the context of brands deals with the authenticity of market offerings (objects and services) in contrast to the authenticity of human beings; (2) Brand authenticity is based on the evaluations of individuals rather than being solely related to the inherent attributes of the brand (for references on this topic cf. Beverland and Farrelly 2010); (3) Brand authenticity corresponds to a variety of attributes since there is no unique definition of the authenticity concept, particularly in the branding context"
(Morhart et al., 2015, p. 202)	Empirical Qualitative and Quantitative	(Perceived) Brand authenticity	"Brand authenticity thus emerges to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves.""
(Napoli et al., 2014, p. 1091)	Empirical Quantitative	Brand authenticity	"In this study brand authenticity is defined as a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers."
(Fritz et al., 2017, p. 327)	Empirical Quantitative	Brand authenticity	"In summary, brand authenticity can be defined as the perceived consistency of a brand's behavior that reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining its brand essence or substantive nature, whereby the perceptual process involves two types of authenticity (i.e. indexical and iconic authenticity)."
(Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018, p. 1391)	Empirical Quantitative	Brand authenticity	"we define an authentic brand as one that is perceived by consumers as having a clear philosophy it lives by; one with a sense of what it stands for; a brand that lives up to its promise."
(Becker et al., 2019, p. 25)	Empirical Qualitative and Quantitative	Advertising (Ad) authenticity	"We define an authentic advertisement as one that is genuine, real, and true with regard to some executional element or dimension"
(Sirianni et al., 2013, p. 111)	Empirical Quantitative	Employee authenticity	"the degree to which customers have confidence in the sincerity of an employee's brand-aligned behaviour"
(Spielmann et al., 2018, p. 654)	Empirical Qualitative and Quantitative	Place authenticity	"PA shares conceptual underpinnings with authenticity in general. However, PA more specifically emphasizes a consumer's perception of experiencing a genuine representation of a defined place in a manner that provides potential for value through appreciation and transformation."

Source: Author´s elaboration

Brand authenticity: dimensions and measurement scales

Past research presents a diversity of dimensions when describing both authenticity and brand authenticity concepts, with the majority of the works assuming a multi-dimensional perspective, instead of a uni-dimensional one. Regarding measurement scales, the literature also provides several instruments, with different dimensions and applied to different contexts. However, it is possible to claim that the scales developed by Bruhn et al. (2012), Napoli et al. (2014), Schallehn et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015) are the ones that seem to act as a reference for several authors when addressing the brand authenticity topic.

Bruhn et al. (2012) develop a scale to measure consumers´ perceived brand authenticity and this scale includes four dimensions: continuity, originality, reliability and naturalness. Other research works have used the scale "as is" or have adjusted it (e.g. Fritz et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2019). The scale developed by Napoli et al. (2014) has 14 items and integrates three main dimensions (factors): quality commitment, heritage and sincerity. Examples of articles that apply this scale can also be found in the literature (e.g. Assiouras et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2016). In the case of the scale developed by Schallehn et al. (2014), different examples of studies that apply this scale can also be identified (e.g., Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Manthiou et al., 2018). Finally, Morhart et al. (2015) propose a 15-item scale to measure perceived brand authenticity that includes four dimensions: credibility, integrity, symbolism and continuity. This scale has also been adopted by different authors (e.g., Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018; Zanon et al., 2019). Although the scales of Bruhn et al. (2012), Napoli et al. (2014), Schallehn et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015) are more often referred in the literature, other scales have been developed to measure the brand authenticity concept (e.g., Akbar & Wymer, 2017). In the case of the study presented by Akbar and Wymer (2017), the concept is conceptualized with two dimensions: originality and genuineness.

Some highlights that can be taken out from the analysis is that some dimensions associated to the construct are shared among different authors. Firstly, the dimension of continuity is recognized by Bruhn et al. (2012) and Morhart et al. (2015). Secondly, the attribute of originality included in the scale developed by Bruhn et al. (2012) is also referred as a key element of authenticity by different authors like, for instance, Fine (2003), Gundlach and Neville (2012), Mody and Hanks (2019) and Akbar and Wymer (2017). In fact, although not all of these studies have used a scale to measure authenticity, these authors recognize the importance of the dimension. Thirdly, the quality commitment dimension referred in the scale of Napoli et al. (2014), has also been recognized by Beverland (2006). Fourthly, the importance of the heritage dimension also incorporated in the scale of Napoli et al. (2014), has also been

considered a key element to describe authenticity/ brand authenticity by Beverlan (2006), Gundlach and Neville (2012), Choi et al. (2015) and Spiggle et al. (2012).

These conclusions are, indeed, aligned with what is referred by Fritz et al. (2017) who consider that although the brand authenticity measurement scales displayed are different, they have some similarities as they all "cover the aspects of consistency (i.e. continuity, heritage), honesty (i.e. reliability, quality commitment, credibility) and genuineness (i.e. naturalness, sincerity, integrity)" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 327).

Other scales have also been developed to measure a more specific aspect of brand authenticity. For instance, in the case of celebrity brand authenticity (e.g., Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Moulard et al., 2015). Finally, to measure brand extension authenticity, Spiggle et al. (2012) present a scale that incorporates four dimensions and to measure perceived authenticity of advertising, a scale with seven items and two dimensions has also been proposed (Miller, 2015).

Antecedents and consequences

When studying the antecedents and consequences of authenticity and, in concrete, brand authenticity, one can realize that the fragmentation and diversity are also present when drivers and outcomes are concerned. Adding to this, and especially in the case of the antecedents, it seems that there is some confusion between what is considered an antecedent and what is considered a dimension of the brand authenticity construct. This conclusion is aligned with what is stated by Wymer and Akbar (2017) who argue that in the literature of brand authenticity, some authors have considered dimensions which seem to have no relationship with the authenticity construct. Therefore, on the authors´ opinion, they should have not been considered a dimension of authenticity/ brand authenticity, but a different construct- an antecedent, consequence, mediator or moderator (Wymer & Akbar, 2017). For instance, Schallehn et al. (2014) study brand consistency and brand continuity as antecedents of brand authenticity, while other authors consider these concepts as dimensions or attributes of brand authenticity (e.g., Bruhn et al., 2012; Eggers et al., 2013; Fritz et al., 2017; Morhart et al., 2015). Another example is related to brand heritage who is considered by Fritz et al. (2017) as an antecedent of brand authenticity but for Beverland (2006) it is an attribute of authenticity and for Napoli et al. (2014), it is a dimension of brand authenticity. Based on the literature review performed, the antecedents that have been studied in two or more studies are: Perception of iconicity/ Iconic cues, Perception of indexicality/ Indexical cues, Rarity, Stability, Family firm image, Manufacturing factors, Marketing factors, brand consistency, brand continuity, brand

individuality and brand nostalgia. Firstly, in the case of Perception of iconicity and indexicality, there are several studies which analyze them as antecedents of authenticity (e.g., Carsana & Jolibert, 2018; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Morhart et al., 2015). Secondly, in the case of rarity and stability, these constructs have been studied by Moulard et al. (2015) and by Moulard et al. (2016) as antecedents of celebrity authenticity and of brand authenticity, respectively. In the research of Moulard et al. (2015), rarity is defined as "the degree to which the celebrity is seen as uncommon" (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 177) and stability is considered to be present when a celebrity has "similar behavior over time" (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 177). Moulard et al. (2016) focus their research on brand authenticity and, according to the authors, on a brand context, rarity is associated to the unique behavior of a brand and stability is present when the brand behaviors are consistent. Thirdly, some studies have also focused on family firms and on the importance of communicating these facts (e.g., Lude & Prügl, 2018; Zanon et al., 2019). In both studies, the authors find that communicating the family nature of a company enhances the perception of authenticity of a brand. Fourthly, concerning manufacturing factors, these have also been studied as antecedents of authenticity (e.g., Kadirov, 2015; Newman & Dhar, 2014). In the case of Newman and Dhar (2014), there is a focus on the importance of the manufacturing location to explain that products produced in the original factory are perceived as more authentic, due to a belief of contagion. Moreover, the impact of marketing factors on authenticity and brand authenticity have also been analyzed (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Kadirov, 2015) and, in the specific case of the research developed by Dwivedi and McDonald (2018), the authors find that there is a strong effect of brand marketing communications on brand authenticity. In the case of brand consistency, brand continuity and brand individuality, these constructs have been studied as antecedents, for instance, by Schallehn et al. (2014) and by Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019). Finally, examples of studies analyzing brand nostalgia as an antecedent can also be found in the literature (e.g. Fritz et al., 2017; Heinberg et al., 2020).

It is possible to realize that although some concepts have not been clearly studied as antecedents of brand authenticity, they are referred by several authors due to their importance within the context of authenticity, whether they are described as drivers of authenticity, attributes or key elements of authenticity. This happens, for instance, with concepts like territory of origin/ country of origin and brand heritage. For instance, territory of origin/ country of origin has not only been studied as an antecedent of product authenticity, having a positive effect on perceived product authenticity (e.g., Zhang & Merunka, 2015), but also its relevance has been highlighted in the authenticity context (e.g., Arora et al., 2016; Cheah et al., 2016).The

consequences of authenticity and brand authenticity seem to be more consensual among researchers. The consequences that have been studied by more researchers (in six or more studies) are: Purchase intention, Expected quality, Trust, Perceived brand value and Loyalty.

Purchase intention has, in fact, been widely analyzed as a consequence of brand authenticity (e.g., Assiouras et al., 2015; Fritz et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2015). This has also been the case of expected quality, as research associates authenticity perceptions with product quality perceptions (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020; Lu et al., 2015). Furthermore, different studies have also confirmed that brand authenticity fosters brand trust (e.g., Eggers et al., 2013; Schallehn et al., 2014) and other authors have reached to the conclusion that brand authenticity is positively associated with brand loyalty (e.g., Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Choi et al., 2015; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Lu et al., 2015). Finally, the association between brand authenticity and perceived brand value has also been established (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Riefler, 2020). Emerging from the literature review performed, Figure 4.4 presents an integrative framework of the relationships between the constructs.

Figure 4.4- Integrative framework
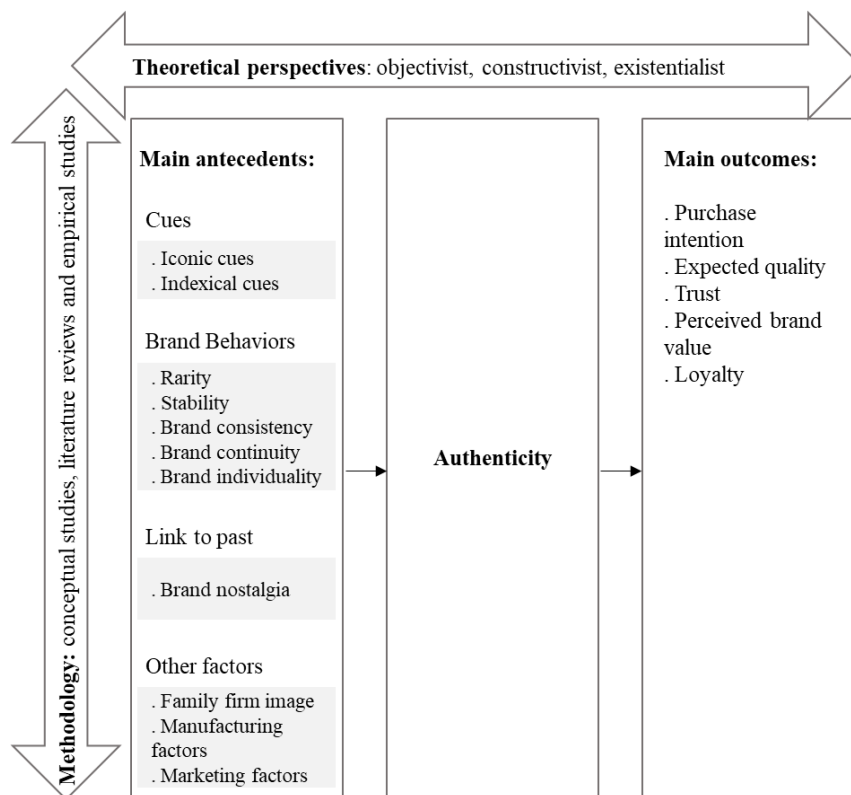
Source: Author´s elaboration

4.3 Future Research

The systematic literature review performed reveals several research gaps that present avenues for future research. Table 4.8 identifies major knowledge gaps that come out from the literature, and also identifies some of the studies where these gaps are highlighted. Hence, 6 major gaps are presented.

Continue to study the authenticity construct

Different authors state that, despite the importance of brand authenticity in contemporary life and in marketing research, academic research about the topic is still in its infancy (Bruhn et al., 2012) and that there is a need to have a deeper understanding of this construct. For instance, the need to have better understanding of how consumers assess brand authenticity (Gundlach & Neville, 2012), to research more dimensions of authenticity (Ilicic & Webster, 2014), to measure brand authenticity in a more objective way, including, for instance, the voice of consumers (Eggers et al., 2013) or to have more knowledge about the impact of iconic and indexical cues (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) on the perception of authenticity.

Perform deeper research about the relationship of brand authenticity and other related constructs (antecedents or consequences)

Fritz et al. (2017) consider that although there is a trend of growing research concerning the study of the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity, there is still a research gap concerning this topic. The authors highlight the need to empirically study this topic, in a quantitative way, to understand the most important antecedents of brand authenticity, its outcomes and how they can vary depending on the brand context. This call becomes more urgent as we realize that there is a high level of fragmentation involved in the research of the topic.

Undertake a cross-cultural analysis

Several studies also suggest that the conceptual models presented should be tested in different countries to understand the role of culture and country specificities in the perception of brand authenticity.

Explore authenticity/ brand authenticity in different industries (product categories)

To study how the different brand contexts/ product categories can influence the perception of brand authenticity is also a path for future research (e.g., Huang, 2010; Ilicic & Webster, 2014;

Sjostrom et al., 2016; Spiggle et al., 2012). In the specific case of hospitality and tourism, there is a clear call to have more research focused on the study of authenticity in this field (Busser & Shulga, 2019; R. Chen et al., 2020; Manthiou et al., 2018; Mody et al., 2019).

Undertake a longitudinal approach

Most of the studies have explored brand authenticity using a cross-sectional approach. Therefore, longitudinal research is suggested to understand how the examined constructs and the dynamics evolve over time.

Identify consumers´ characteristics that may influence the perception of brand authenticity

Another path for future research is to understand how the individual characteristics of consumers can influence the perception of brand authenticity. It is, in fact, recognized by several scholars that consumers´ culture and the industries analyzed can influence the perceptions of brand authenticity. However, it is not so common to have studies that address the individual characteristics of consumers as a relevant moderator variable. Lehman et al. (2019) have, indeed, pointed out to this stream of research and Kovács (2019) suggests that "authenticity is in the eye of the beholder", concluding that there is high variance among individuals in their associations and meanings applied to authenticity. In the tourism context, Sedmak and Mihalič (2008) recognize that age, education and mode of travel organization influence tourists' perception of authenticity. Rodriguez-Lopez et al. (2020) also suggest, as future research, to analyze how the perception of brand authenticity can vary, taking into account different generation segments of consumers. Hence, it would be relevant to better understand how the individual characteristics of consumers could lead to the variability of definitions and meanings of brand authenticity, presented in the literature.

Table 4.8- Gaps and future research (*)

Major gaps and future research identified	Study
1. *Continue to study the authenticity construct*	(Gundlach & Neville, 2012); (Bruhn et al., 2012); (Schallehn et al., 2014); (Ilicic & Webster, 2014) ; (Miller, 2015) ; (Eggers et al., 2013) ; (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) ; (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010) ; (Frost et al., 2020)
2. *Perform deeper research about the relationship of brand authenticity and other related constructs (antecedents or consequences)*	(Morhart et al., 2015); (Assiouras et al., 2015); (Moulard et al., 2016); (Carù et al., 2017); (Akbar & Wymer, 2017); (Rather et al., 2019); (Fritz et al., 2017).
3. *Undertake a cross-cultural analysis*	(Wiedmann et al., 2012); (Morhart et al., 2015); (Zhang & Merunka, 2015); (Castéran & Roederer, 2013); (Davis et al., 2019); (Jian et al., 2019), (Skinner et al., 2020).
4. *Explore authenticity/ brand authenticity in different industries (product categories)*	(Huang, 2010) ; (Ilicic & Webster, 2014) ; (Napoli et al., 2016); (Sjostrom et al., 2016) ; (Mody & Hanks, 2019) ; (Busser & Shulga, 2019) ; (Spiggle et al., 2012) ; (Manthiou et al., 2018), (R. Chen et al., 2020).
5. *Undertake a longitudinal approach*	(Wiedmann et al., 2011); (Bruhn et al., 2012); (Rather et al., 2019); (Beverland, 2006); (Lu et al., 2015); (Guèvremont, 2018).
6. *Identify consumers´ characteristics that may influence the perception of brand authenticity*	(Rodriguez-Lopez et al., 2020); (Lehman et al., 2019); (Kovács, 2019); (Sedmak & Mihalič, 2008).

(*) This table presents some examples of studies that identify the main research gaps refered.

Source: Author´s elaboration

4.4 Conclusions and implications

As with any other study, this systematic review has some limitations, many of them associated to the process handled. Firstly, the databases chosen to identify the articles, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined, introduce a certain level of subjectivity, which could lead to some relevant studies being left out. However, we tried to address this limitation by checking the reference lists of the articles and this have led us to include, in the systematic review, important articles and books that have not appeared primarily on the search. Secondly, human error can always exist, especially when dealing with a high number of articles, which is the case in this review. Nevertheless, we believe that the inclusion of all these relevant articles in the review will enable a deeper and more holistic understanding of brand authenticity. In spite of its limitations, this study leads to important conclusions.

In this review, we set out to better understand the concept of brand authenticity. The subjectivity associated to the construct and the existing fragmented knowledge, mirrored in the different definitions and meanings associated to it, turn pertinent a systematic review on the topic. As the literature review performed shows, authenticity and, in concrete, brand

authenticity, is an important area of research within the marketing field. The growing number of studies about the topic, published in different peer-reviewed journals, especially since 2012 on, highlights the increasing interest of researchers on brand authenticity. Furthermore, the diversity of authors studying it, with the majority of articles being published by more than one author, as well as the geographical dispersion of studies, in different research contexts (industries analyzed), show the international and cross-market importance of brand authenticity.

The different perspectives about brand authenticity, introduce some challenges when trying to synthetize the knowledge around the concept. This fragmentation is reflected on the different theoretical approaches that are found in the literature, on the different dimensions associated with the constructs and on the different definitions given by the authors. Despite the challenges found, one of the key objectives of the systematic review performed was to find what has been the common ground among researchers. Having that in mind, when analyzing the theoretical perspectives and the nature of authenticity, three types of authenticity seem to reach some level of agreement: objective, constructive, and existential authenticity. These types of authenticity are many times related to iconic and indexical cues that are considered essential to build the perception of authenticity.

Authenticity has, in fact, been studied across different research disciplines and, therefore, it is applied to places, experiences, objects, subjects, among others. Within marketing research, authenticity as an attribute of a person (e.g. employee authenticity) and authenticity as an attribute of an object (e.g. brand authenticity), appear as distinct streams of research. In fact, when authenticity is applied in the context of brands, the construct of brand authenticity emerges. Based on the literature review performed, it can be concluded that brand authenticity is, many times, associated with a brand being real, genuine, true to itself and its consumers and with a consistent behavior, mirroring its values. Some attributes are also highlighted as they are considered fundamental for a brand to be perceived as authentic. The majority of the analyzed articles assume that authenticity and brand authenticity are multi-dimensional constructs and there are some scales, the ones developed by Bruhn et al. (2012), Napoli et al. (2014), Schallehn et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015), that seem to be a reference to measure brand authenticity.

Concerning the antecedents and/or consequences of authenticity and brand authenticity, several constructs have been studied. However, especially in the case of the antecedents, the analysis presents challenges as some constructs have been considered, by some authors, as a dimension of authenticity/ brand authenticity and, by others, as an antecedent. In the case of the consequences, there seems to be more consensus and the ones that have been studied by more

researchers (in six or more studies) are: purchase intention, expected quality, trust, perceived brand value and loyalty. Finally, the literature review performed also reveals several research gaps where future research could focus on: i) continue to study the authenticity construct due to its relevance and the stage of knowledge; ii) perform deeper research about the relationship of brand authenticity and other related constructs (antecedents or consequences); iii) undertake a cross-cultural analysis; iv) explore authenticity/ brand authenticity in different industries (product categories), v) undertake a longitudinal approach, and vi) identify consumers´ characteristics that may influence the perception of brand authenticity.

As major theoretical contributions, this systematic review has mapped the past and structured the existing knowledge about a key contemporary concept and has shed light on the future research pathway. Concerning practical implications, it becomes clear that although brand authenticity can have different meanings for different consumers, its outcomes for the companies and the brands are very relevant. Therefore, this review will help marketers to understand better this phenomenon, acknowledging the different definitions, dimensions and attributes associated to it, as well as the related constructs. This knowledge will enable, for instance, the development of strategies and the implementation of tactics that could tackle specific brand attributes or specific antecedents of brand authenticity, to achieve a desired outcome. Finally, marketers will also benefit from being aware of the existing scales to measure the concept.

5. Study Three- Managers´ perspectives

After describing the thesis methodology, carrying out the systematic literature reviews on the relevant concepts and identifying the research gaps and the research questions to be addressed, the next steps are devoted to the empirical part of the thesis.

Study three- presented in this chapter- captures the perspectives of hospitality managers on the constructs being analyzed, namely, brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, in the context of upscale hotels. Besides giving insights about the managers´ perspectives, this chapter also contributes to fine tune the proposed conceptual model that is tested in Study four. This chapter is structured as follows: introduction, methodology of the study, findings, discussion of the findings, and, finally, conclusions and implications.

5.1 Introduction

This study aims to understand the perspectives, opinions and perceptions of hospitality managers about the analyzed topics and also gives insights for Study four. Based on the research questions identified, the study´s objectives are i) to identify the most important dimensions of brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement in an upscale hotel, based on the managers´ point of view, ii) to understand how the main constructs (their definitions, main associations…) are perceived by practitioners, iii) to identify the stimuli that managers associate to experience and authenticity, iv) to understand the main mechanisms to establish engagement with customers in this type of hotels, v) to identify the outcomes that are important for managers in this sector and in this type of hotels, and vi) to have insights about how the global "new reality", imposed by COVID-19 pandemic could impact the sector and the relevance of the topics under study.

5.2 Methodology

A qualitative approach is applied in Study three and semi-structured in-depth interviews are used as the main tool to collect the data, as previously presented in chapter 2. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and Malhotra et al. (2017), a validation of data through cross-verification from different sources is applied. In this case, a combination of in-depth interviews, field notes from the interviews´ observation and other secondary data like journals and

magazines of the sector, opinion articles and the hotels websites, are used to triangulate the data.

5.2.1 Sample characteristics

Concerning the sample, we interviewed hospitality managers who are experts in the hospitality field, namely in upscale and luxury hotel segments, due to their practical experience. We decided to interview top managers as they have both a strategic and operational perspective about the sector and the main drivers, forces and trends influencing it. To define the research sample we identified individuals who matched the described profile and also used a snowball effect by asking experts in the field to suggest potential interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We managed to interview 11 participants who are top managers in hotels, hotel chains, hospitality and tourism associations and in consultancy (hospitality and luxury consultancy). Table 5.1 shows the sample characteristics. The column "Position" specifies the job position of the participant at the time of the interview and the column "Sector experience" refers, approximately, to the years of experience within the sector, at the time of the interview.

Table 5.1- Sample characteristics

Participants	Position	Sector experience (# years)
P1	Consultant/ Advisor	8
P2	General Manager	30
P3	Managing Director	>30
P4	Board Member	25
P5	Consultant/ Advisor	30
P6	CEO	>30
P7	Director	25
P8	VP Sales and Marketing	30
P9	Consultant/ Advisor	30
P10	Sales Director	15
P11	Assistant General Manager	3

Source: Author´s elaboration

5.2.2 In-depth interviews

The interviews were held in Portuguese, therefore, the direct quotes from the interviews, included in this thesis, have been translated from Portuguese to English by the researcher. The interviews took place between May 2020 and July 2020 and were done online to ensure all the security and safety requirements due to the pandemic situation. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1h40.

The interview guide covered the topics of brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity, main outcomes, relationship among the concepts and the impact of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 on the sector and on the analyzed constructs. Although there was a pre-defined flow, it was flexible and, in fact, was adapted for some of the interviews. For instance, in three of the interviews the construct of brand authenticity was discussed before the customer engagement topic as it was spontaneously brought by the interviewees. The questions were applied to the context of upscale hotels. Please see the interview guide in Annex A.

The number of interviews performed is related to the fact that, in the last interviews, it seemed that the same patterns of answers were appearing, leading to a sense of saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the participants´ authorization.

5.2.3 Data analysis

As explained in chapter 2, a careful content analysis process was applied to the data. We analyzed and coded data from in-depth interviews using the NVivo software. The software is a relevant tool for content analysis as it facilitates the exploration of patterns in the answers and the creation of codes that are common themes that emerge from the data. This approach helped us to find insights and achieve more robust conclusions.

The coding was guided by previous literature reviews on brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement and also emerged from the data collected. For instance, some brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement characteristics derived from the literature review performed and others emerged exclusively from the data collected. Other codes (themes) like, for instance, related to COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 and also related to the elements (stimuli) associated with brand experience and brand authenticity emerged only from the data. The analysis was iterative as we kept moving backwards and forwards between the data to have a deeper understanding of the phenomena and to realize if other possible interpretations could also be explored. A three-step procedure was carried out,

as suggested by Rego, Cunha and Polónia (2017). First, "the features of the topic as expressed directly by interviewees were identified and then organized into tentative clusters of similarity and distinction" (Rego et al., 2017, p. 138). These clusters are referred as first-order constructs. Second, those first-order constructs were grouped into second-order groups, according to similarities and differences or other forms of relationships between them. Third, second-order constructs were grouped into more abstract concepts and are referred as third-order constructs. Additionally to the content analysis carried out on the interviews, we also carried out a quantitative analysis to identify:

i)   *Sources:* the number of interviewees who refer to a specific theme or sub-theme;

ii)   *References:* the number of times (frequency) a theme/ sub-theme is mentioned.

5.3 Findings

Table 5.2 presents the codes that have emerged from the data analysis, organized by third-order, second-order and first-order constructs. Based on the interviews performed, we realize that the sub-themes (second-order constructs) associated with the construct of Brand Experience (third-order construct) in upscale hotels are: i) relevance (importance) of the experience topic, ii) elements that are specific to the upscale hotel experience, iii) characteristics of the customer experience, iv) elements that influence this experience (human element and atmospheric elements) and v) the role of the hotel as a facilitator of related experiences (outside the hotel).

Concerning the construct of Customer Engagement (third-order construct), the associated sub-themes (second-order constructs) that emerge from the interviews are, firstly, the relevance of the engagement concept, secondly, the mechanism used by the hotels to establish and maintain the engagement with guests and, finally, the specific characteristics of engagement.

Regarding the Brand Authenticity construct (third-order construct), the sub-themes (second-order constructs) of authenticity relevance, authenticity characteristics, the elements (human element and atmospheric elements) that influence the perception of authenticity in upscale hotels and the main challenges associated with the topic, emerge from the interviews.

The relationships among the concepts of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity are also a topic under study, as well as their possible outcomes. Concerning possible outcomes, data are organized within the sub-categories (second-order constructs) of behavioral, attitudinal and financial outcomes.

Finally, the interviewees´ opinions of how COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 impact the sector, the Brand Experience, the customer Engagement and the Brand Authenticity

perceptions, as well as the main factors to ensure guests´ confidence in hotels (second-order constructs), also emerge as sub-themes from the interviews.

Table 5.2- Data codes: first-order, second-order and third-order constructs

Third-order construct (theme)	Second-order construct (sub-theme)	First-order construct (sub-theme)
Brand Experience	Relevance of the experience	Level of relevance
	Experience in Upscale Hotels	Main factors influencing the type of experience
		Unique and Memorable experiences
		The customer journey
		High quality of services, facilities & amenities
		Location
		Guest service
		Consistency
	Experience characteristics	Sensorial characteristics
		Emotional characteristics
		Learning characteristics
		Transformational characteristics
	Human element	Human interactions
	Other elements (atmospherics)	Facilities & amenities
		Decoration
		Design
		Architecture
		Food & Beverages
		Colors and Light
		Perfume
	Related experiences	Hotel as facilitator
Customer Engagement	Relevance of engagement	Level of relevance
		Target
	Engagement mechanisms	Human element
		The customer journey
		Online
		Loyalty programs

Third-order construct (theme)	Second-order construct (sub-theme)	First-order construct (sub-theme)
		Consistency
	Engagement characteristics	Emotional characteristics
		Intellectual characteristics
		Identification characteristics
		Interactions with the brand (online and offline)
Brand Authenticity	Relevance of authenticity	Level of relevance
	Authenticity characteristics	Back to basics
		Uniqueness
		Genuineness
		Reflecting the brand values
		Delivering the brand promise
		Integration in local environment and local culture
		Heritage (origin)
		Consistency
	Human element	Human interactions
	Other elements (atmospherics)	Food & Beverages
		Design
		Decoration
		Amenities
		Architecture
		Perfume
		Music
	Challenges	Procedures vs authenticity
Relationships among the concepts	Mechanism	Identified paths
Outcomes	Behavioral	Recommendation
		Positive WOM (online and offline)
		Return (repurchase)
		Brand ambassadors
	Attitudinal	Satisfaction
	Financial	Less price sensitive
		Lower Marketing investment required

Third-order construct (theme)	Second-order construct (sub-theme)	First-order construct (sub-theme)
COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19	COVID-19 impacts on the sector	New characteristics of traveling and stays
		Human element
		The need to travel
		Technology
		Financial resilience
	Main factors to ensure confidence	Safety and Security procedures
		Vaccine
		Trust the brand
	Impact of COVID-19 on the analyzed constructs	Brand Experience
		Customer Engagement
		Brand Authenticity

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Concerning the number of sources mentioning the topics under study during the interviews, the themes of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement, Brand Authenticity and COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 have been mentioned by all the interviewees and the Relationships among the concepts and Outcomes have been mentioned by 7 and 10 interviewees, respectively. The construct of Brand Experience has the highest number of references, in concrete, 244 references. Please see Table 5.3.

Table 5.3- Sources and references of third-order constructs

Third-order construct	Number of Sources	Number of References
Brand Experience	11	244
Customer Engagement	11	129
Brand Authenticity	11	169
Relationships among the concepts	7	11
Outcomes	10	59
COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19	11	106

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.1 Brand Experience

Next, we discuss the conceptualizations of Brand Experience. Interview questions guide the findings´ presentation.

Q1- In your opinion, how important is the guest experience in a hotel? Why?

The experience lived by a guest in a hotel and, in particular, in an upscale hotel, is considered to be very important, fundamental, by all the interviewees. Participant P4 considers that "The experience is fundamental", Participant P5 refers that "It is extremely important", Participant P9 states that "…the customer experience is the core business of hospitality" and Participant P7 also considers that "Nowadays, more than the lodging service provided by hotels, it is the experience lived by the customers while staying at the hotel that matters the most…and for a hotel with this positioning, it is almost the essence of the stay". It is, in fact, referred by Participant P2 that "Nowadays there is a strong transition towards the experimental luxury" and Participant P5 states that "The experience is such an important concept nowadays that it has led some hotel chains, especially in the luxury segment, to create specific job positions to respond to the topic. This is the role of the Experience Manager". Moreover, it is referred by 4 interviewees (36%) that customer experience is an element of differentiation for hotels. As stated by Participant P5, "Customer experience has become a factor for hotel differentiation, to justify higher prices and to improve the engagement and relationship with customers". Finally, some challenges associated with the experience are also highlighted by the participants, namely, the challenge of being able to deliver new experiences every time the customer returns to the hotel. This challenge is referred by 3 interviewees (27%). This is particularly evident when Participant P8 mentions the first time the customer goes to the hotel and compares to repeated visits, saying that "In the first time, it is easy to create an experience, to present the destination, to present the hotel and there is excitement around that as it is the first time. The challenge is what to suggest and deliver as experience for the second, third or fourth times".

The first-order and second-order constructs associated with Brand Experience that emerge from this question are represented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1- First-order and second-order constructs, emerging from Q1, associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q2- What kind of experience should an upscale hotel provide to its guests?

In order to answer the above question, Participant P1 considered that it was important to differentiate upscale/ premium hotels from luxury hotels. In fact, Participant P1 states that "First of all, it is important to contextualize and differentiate what is premium from what is luxury... Generally speaking, what is premium? It´s competitive. In other words, it has competitors. In the automobile sector, Mercedes and BMW are premium. Luxury cars do not have competitors as there is no other brand that occupies that space. This is, for instance, the case of Ferrari. It is important to establish a parallel reasoning within hospitality". Moreover, the majority of the respondents consider that there is no such thing as a standard experience in an upscale hotel. Six interviewees (55%) consider that the customer experience in a hotel is influenced by different types of factors, namely, the type of hotel (e.g. resort, city hotel etc.), the motivations of the guests (business, leisure or MICE customers), and the type of customer (e.g. couples, families etc.). According to Participant P4, "The experience, depending on the type of hotel, is different. In fact, there are two important factors: the type of hotel and the main motivation of the stay". Participant P5 adds that "It depends on the type of clients and on the type of hotel. If we are talking about family hotels, the experiences are more focused on the families, in the family involvement." Participant P8 considers that "We have to distinguish between two types of customer, many times, between three types of customers. The first one is the leisure guest, the second one is the customer who comes for business. In this case, it is the corporate traveler,

business traveler. For the third type of customer, business is also the main motivation for the stay, but he/she travels to a specific destination to go for a conference or business meetings". Therefore, the experiences that these guests look for while staying at a hotel, are different. Although the expected and delivered experience is different based on the before mentioned factors, it seems that there is a transversal element that is present when the experience occurs within the context of hotels with a more high-end positioning. In fact, 8 participants (73%) consider that in this type of hotels, the aim is to provide experiences that are unique and memorable, especially in the case of customers who travel for leisure. Participant P9 considers that "Luxury hotels are used to deliver experiences that create unique memories, making guests feel passioned about the hotel, the hotel services, the destination and, therefore, come back". Participant P3 reinforces the idea saying that "In hospitality, we have to deliver experiences that are unique" and Participant P1 considers that "When we refer to hotels with a high-end, upscale positioning, hotels evolve from memories´ creators to memories´ curators. The main objective is to engrave the experience in the customer´s heart". In order to provide unique and memorable experiences, the surprise element is considered to be very relevant by two (18%) of the respondents. As P9 refers, "It is the beyond expectations element, which means that we have to introduce in the guest service the surprise element, the unexpected element. This creates emotions and, with that, memorable experiences".

Four out of the eleven interviewees (36%) also refer that it is important to pay attention to the customer journey as the hotel experience starts before the stay, in the pre-stay and continues even after the customers leave the hotel, in the post-stay. Participant P11 says that "The experience does not start when the guest arrives to the hotel. It starts before. It starts in the decision process, and in the reservation process, when the guest contacts our reservation team, if it is a direct reservation. All of this is the customer experience. The experience does not end when the customer leaves the hotel. I think it is also included in the customer experience, the post-stay experience". Moreover, Participant P2 refers to the importance of expectations that are, many times, created in the pre-stay, stating that "The experience has to be placed in the brand sphere as the brand has associated values that create guests´ expectations. If a brand has certain values, it has to put them in practice and transmit and translate them into the customer experience".

Two other sub-themes emerge when discussing the kind of experience that an upscale hotel should deliver to its guests: the high quality of services, facilities and amenities and the importance of location. Firstly, 5 interviewees (45%) consider that an upscale hotel needs to provide high quality services, facilities and amenities. Participant P9 explains that "We cannot

have a luxury hotel in a building with no quality" and Participant P7 states that "I would say that service quality has to be prime and that the quality of the services provided has to be much higher than the quality one could get in a regular hotel service". Secondly, the hotel location is also recognized by 3 participants (27%) as a key factor for the hotel, influencing the customer experience. This is explained, for instance, by the Participant P6 who recognizes that "The hotel experience is related to an aspect that has always been considered the most critical and the most important which is the location".

Another sub-theme that emerges when addressing to the type of experience that an upscale hotel should deliver to its customers, is the importance of Guest Service. It is, in fact, the first-order construct that is the most referred, within the Brand Experience context. It has 43 references and is covered by 10 of the interviewees (91%). The respondents consider that an upscale hotel needs to have a quality guest service, which means that it has to meet and exceed the customers´ expectations and even to anticipate their needs. The Guest Service provided involves a high level of personalization and a high level of detail, which is only possible due to the fact that this type of hotels has a deep knowledge of their customers, their preferences and needs. Participant P5 mentions that "the service has to be extremely personalized" and that upscale hotels need to create "a one-to-one relationship which enables a one-to-one offer". Participant P5 also highlights that "We can only deliver a high quality service when we exceed customers´ expectations and to exceed customers´ expectations we need to know the customers during the stay and even before the stay. Only then, we can make the right offers that will meet needs that sometimes are covered. It is important to anticipate the needs". Participant P9 considers that "our service is a package of excellent experiences, perfect experiences. We have to achieve an excellent guest service when we are in the upscale and luxury segments. Perfect, without mistakes". Moreover, Participant P9 adds that "The personal touch is very important. Luxury hotels do it very well. There is a personal touch and an experience of surprising the customers and anticipate their needs".

Concerning the importance of details, Participant P11 mentions that "These high standards of guest service exist even in the small details" which is reinforced by Participant P9 who states that "The number of details to build an experience is enormous. People talk about the moment of truth but, in fact, the moments of truth are as many as the number of employees and customers". Another finding that emerges from the interviews is that the level of excellence in Guest Service increases as we move towards the luxury positioning, as it is stated by Participant P1 "So, if we are talking about luxury, it is a service, an additional service, focused on the

personalization, in order to make the guest feel special. Therefore, it has zero functional elements".

Another relevant sub-theme that comes out, referred by 6 respondents (55%) is the importance of consistency across the whole experience. In fact, Participant P4 states that "This type of hotel is very careful to ensure that all the product is consistent". Participant P5 adds that "There should be consistency among the product, the service and the brand" and, finally, Participant P11 exemplifies by saying that "We cannot have an excellent service in lodging and then in the restaurant or in the swimming pool we don´t have these high standards. In other words, we need to have consistency across the different areas of the hotel, the different services provided, and also consistency between what is communicated to the guest and what is delivered…".

The first-order constructs and second-order construct "Experience in Upscale Hotels" associated with Brand Experience, emerging from this question, are represented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Experience in Upscale Hotels", emerging from Q2, associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
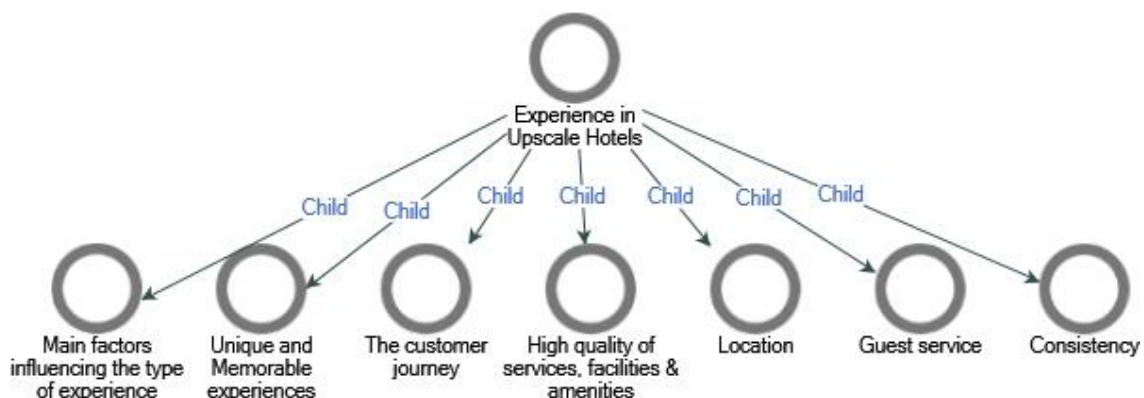
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Another sub-theme emerging from Q2, is the role of upscale hotels as experience facilitators. In fact, 8 respondents (73%) refer to this topic. As stated by the interviewees, many times the hotel establishes the bridge between the customer and the destination, helping the customer to discover the destination, having experiences outside the hotel. The hotels have partnerships with local players and recommend these activities and experiences to the guests, when they believe is convenient. In the participants´ point of view, this is why it is important to know the customers´ motivations, even before the stay. As stated by Participant P8, in the majority of

times, "…the first driver of choice is the destination, and then, the hotel". Participant P4 states that "…the beauty in tourism is that the touristic experience for a leisure trip is multi-sector and involves multiple players", adding that upscale hotels are focused on the global experience of the guest, whether it occurs inside or outside the hotel, stating that it is important for the hotel "…to ensure that the partners who are going to deliver these additional experiences have the same high quality procedures and standards, as the hotel". Therefore, for Participant P3 it is very important that "…when someone from the hotel recommends a restaurant, for instance, with typical meat from the region, he/she should have already gone to that restaurant and tried the meat to know what to recommend".

The first-order constructs and second-order construct "Related experiences" associated with Brand Experience, emerging from this question, are represented in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3- First-order and second-order construct "Related experiences", emerging from Q2, associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Another sub-theme that comes out while discussing the kind of experience that an upscale hotel should provide to its guests is the experience characteristics or, in other words, dimensions. Based on the interviews performed, the different facets of experience can be organized in different sub-themes: sensorial, emotional, learning and transformational. Firstly, 6 interviewees (55%) consider that the experience is connected to the five senses (sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing). Participant P5 considers that "The experience is widely connected to

our own senses…The temperature, the smell, the taste, even though we do not rationalize them, we cannot live without them". Participant P11, referring to their hotel, states that "We are always thinking about the five senses and this is why we pay so much attention to the maintenance of the buildings, the landscapes and the visual beauty in general".

Secondly, 6 interviewees (55%) also refer to the emotional dimension of the experience, considering that the experience is related to feelings and emotions. For instance, Participant P9 states that "We create the experiences in such a way that we have understood that everything is based on human emotions and we are working on that". This is reinforced by Participant P11 who considers that when a guest stays in a hotel, especially in the upscale and luxury segments, he/she is "…not only looking for a place to sleep, but also a place where he/she can feel emotions". From the interviewees´ point of view, this is more evident in the case of guests who travel for leisure. For Participant P1, "It is not the functional side, it is the purely emotional aspect that is exactly the experience".

Thirdly, 2 interviewees (18%) consider that there is also a dimension of learning when customers stay in an upscale hotel as customers also value to learn something from the experience in a hotel. For instance, to learn how to make a fruit juice or how to produce wine. For Participant P8, "Especially in the case of more sophisticated customers, they want learning. They want to take back something with them… At the end of the day, we move from experience, to doing and then, to learning". Finally, 1 interviewee (9%) adds that there are also some customers who value the transformational aspect of customer experience. Therefore, several hotels can provide experiences that can help to transform customers, whether in a more physical or psychological way. For instance, in the case of hotels primarily focused on the concept of wellbeing.

The first-order constructs and second-order construct "Experience characteristics" associated with Brand Experience, emerging from this question, are represented in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Experience characteristics", emerging from Q2, associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
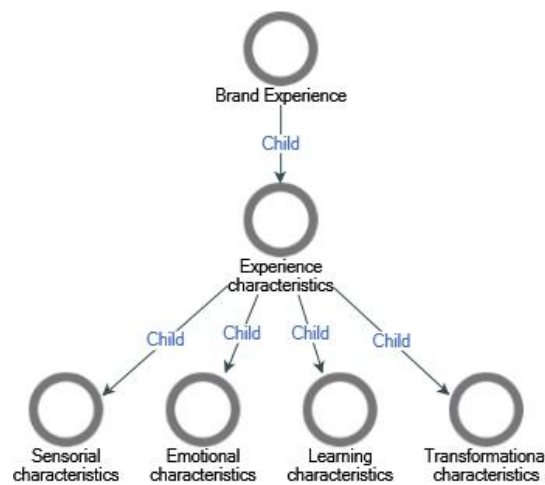
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q3- What kind of stimuli (elements) do you consider important to provide the required experience to guests?

Several elements have been considered relevant by hospitality managers, in order to provide the required experience to guests. The identified elements are organized in two main sub-themes: the human element (hotel staff) and atmospheric elements.

Concerning the atmospheric cues, the hotel facilities and amenities, the hotel decoration, the design, the hotel architecture, Food & Beverages, colors and light and perfume/scent have been recognized as important elements to convey the required experience. In fact, 6 interviewees (55%) referred at least one of the above mentioned elements. For instance, in the case of Food & Beverages, Participants P5, P6, P8, P10 and P11 mention that it is a key component of the whole experience.

Another very important element is the human element. It is composed by the hotel employees and it is recognized as one of the most important components of the experience, because the attitudes and behaviors of the hotel staff and the guest service provided lead to the emotional part of the experience, which, in the case of upscale hotels, is considered to be very important. For example, for Participant P1 "Any service is an act of love" and "The hotel employees who really make the difference are the ones whose motivation is to create happiness in other people". For that to happen, the interviewees underline the importance of recruitment,

employee training, clear top-down communication of the hotel values and mission, clear procedures and operational autonomy. The first-order constructs and second-order constructs "Human element" and "Other elements" associated with Brand Experience, emerging from Q3 are represented in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "Human element" and "Other elements", emerging from Q3, associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
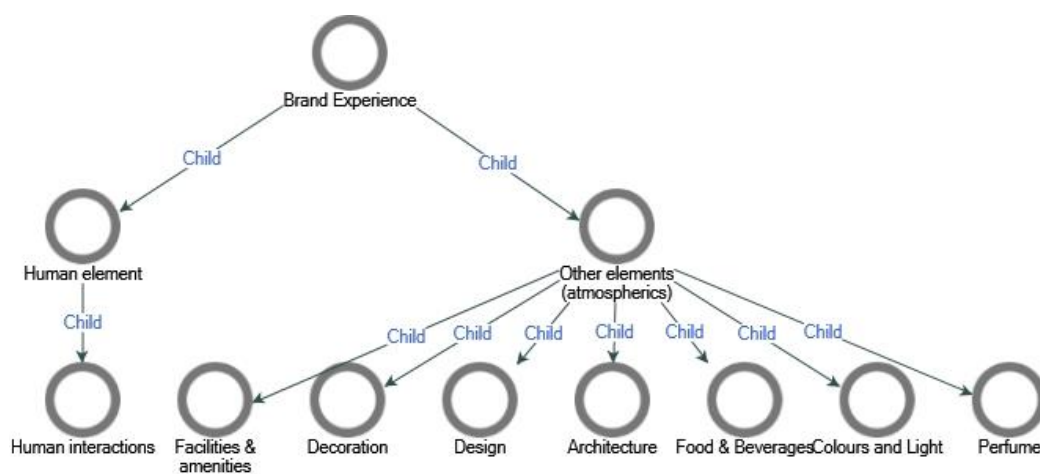
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

When analyzing the second-order constructs associated with Brand Experience, we realize that the sub-theme of Experience in Upscale hotels is the one with highest number of references, in concrete, 105 references (see Table 5.4). The first-order constructs with the highest number of references, also associated with the theme of Brand Experience are Guest Service, the relevance of experience, human interactions, unique and memorable experiences and the role of the hotel as a facilitator of experiences with 43, 32, 22, 19 and 19 references, respectively (see Figure.5.6).

Table 5.4- Sources and references of second-order constructs, associated with Brand Experience

Second-order construct	Number of Sources	Number of References
Relevance of the experience	11	32
Experience in Upscale Hotels	11	105
Experience characteristics	8	34
Human element	9	22
Other elements (atmospherics)	6	32
Related experiences	8	19

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Figure 5.6- Number of References of the Top 5 first-order constructs, associated with Brand Experience

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.2 Customer Engagement

Another topic covered by the in-depth interviews was the topic of customer engagement. The main objectives related to this theme are: i) to identify the most important dimensions of customer engagement in an upscale hotel, based on the managers´ point of view, ii) to

understand how the construct of customer engagement is perceived by practitioners, iv) and to understand the main mechanisms to establish engagement with customers in this type of hotels. In this sub-chapter we present the main findings associated with this topic, based on the interview questions.

Q4- Do you consider important to keep a strong interaction and relationship with hotel guests?
Q5- Should this interaction be kept with all the guests or with only a specific segment?

Concerning the importance of maintaining a relationship with the hotel guests, 7 interviewees (64%) consider that it is important to maintain a relationship, a bond with customers. However, 8 interviewees (73%) highlight that this relationship cannot be standardized. They state that it is important that the brands understand how each customer would like to engage with them. For instance, Participant P4 considers that engagement "…is a challenge and much of the marketing efforts are related to customer engagement. However, the customers are different from each other. Therefore, not all of them would like to receive a newsletter per day, nor to share posts or likes on Facebook or Instagram". Participant P4 adds that "It is important to give some space to customers, in order to understand what kind of relationship they like to maintain with brands". This idea is reinforced by Participant P2 who states that "Engagement is important, but we need to have the ability to understand who would like to be engaged and who would like to be less engaged because the customers are different from each other". The first-order constructs and second-order construct "Relevance of engagement" associated with Customer Engagement, and emerging from Q4 and Q5, are represented in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Relevance of engagement", emerging from Q4 and Q5, associated with Customer Engagement (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

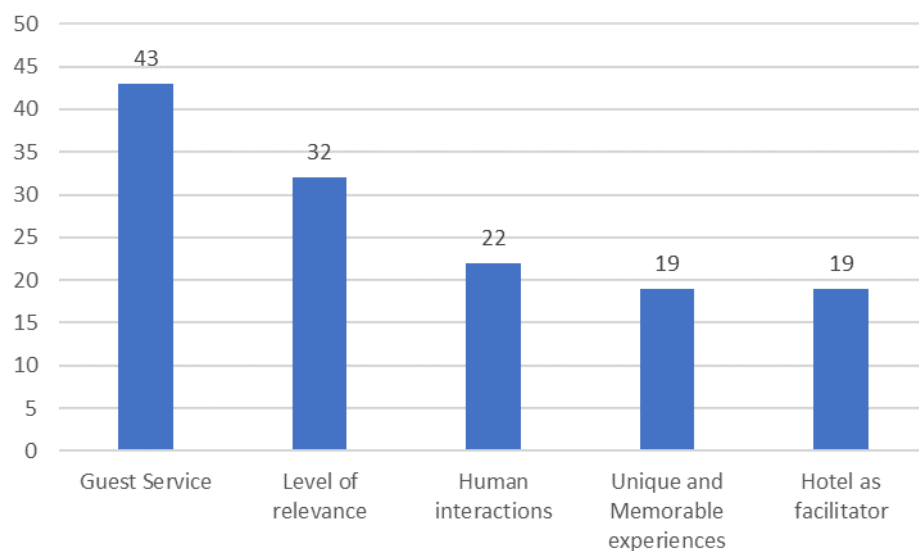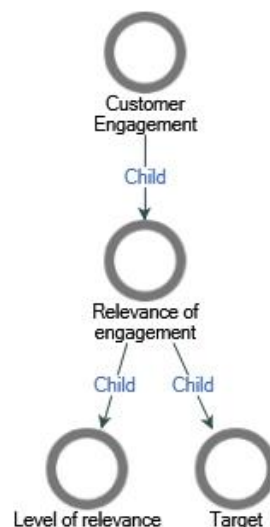Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q6- What are the main mechanisms to establish and maintain an engaged customer?

When asked about the main mechanisms/ elements to establish and maintain an engaged customer in the context of upscales hotels, the following mechanisms are mentioned: the human element, online mechanisms and loyalty programs. Moreover, the interviewees refer that it is important to establish and maintain the engagement along the customer journey. They also consider that consistency is, once again, very important. Firstly, the human element as a key factor to maintain customer engagement is referred by 9 interviewees (82%). It is, in fact, the first-order construct that is the most referred, within Customer Engagement, with 28 references. Participant P2 explains that "Many times, it is the product that identifies the brand and the ones who contribute to create such a strong product image are the employees who are able to imprint a strong and specific character in the product, due to their work, dedication and passion". Participant P2 also explains that "I had a customer who used to say: "I come back to the hotel because of the staff" and we have many customers who say this…". The same interviewee mentions the interaction between the staff and the guests, referring that "There is a very strong and personal interaction, and this is very much appreciated by the guests". Participant P5 adds that "The hotel industry is an industry from people to people, like the motto of Ritz-Carlton-*Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen*" and also gives some examples, saying that "It is not really about the slippers or the robe with the initials of the guest´s name, it is

mainly about the interactions, from people to people, absolutely emotional". Participant P11 also gives the example of customers who return to the hotel because they create bonds with the employees.

Besides the human element, that has a key role especially during the stay, 8 interviewees (73%) also refer that it is particularly important to sustain the interactions with customers during the customer journey, in other words, before, during and after the stay. For instance, Participant P3 explains that interacting with the guest before check-in is very important because it is an opportunity to pose some questions to the customers about their preferences and, therefore, personalize the service. The same Participant also refers to the check-out moment as an opportunity to collect feedback. Participant P8 reinforces the idea that it is very important to interact with the guests during the stay also because it is an opportunity to receive feedback *in loco* from the customer. Moreover, Participant P11 considers that engagement is very much related with the communication between the hotel and the guest over time and highlights the importance of the post-stay communication, saying that it is important to communicate the hotel news, invite the customers for hotel events and communicate with customers in specific moments like the anniversary or before summer vacations.

Three interviewees (27%) refer loyalty programs as a relevant mechanism to establish and maintain engaged customers and 6 interviewees (55%) refer the online interactions between the hotel and the guests, based on social media, e-mails or newsletters, as important mechanisms to ensure the communication. Finally, consistency over time is also considered by 1 interviewee (9%) as a key element to ensure customer engagement. The first-order constructs and the second-order construct "Engagement mechanisms" associated with Customer Engagement, and emerging from Q6, are represented in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Engagement mechanisms", emerging from Q6, associated with Customer Engagement (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
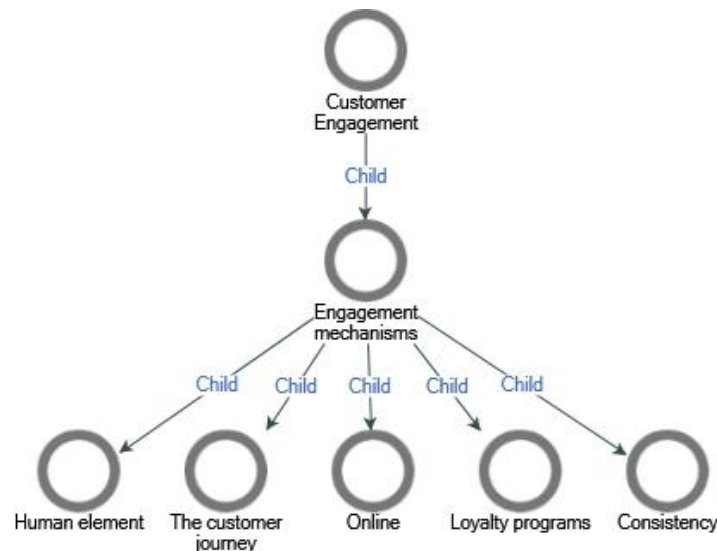
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q7- How do you know if the guest is really engaged with the hotel?

When questioned about how to know if a customer is engaged with the hotel, four different characteristics/ dimensions seem to emerge: emotional characteristics, intellectual characteristics, identification characteristics and a fourth dimension related to interactions with the brand, both online and offline.

In the case of the emotional component, it is recognized by 9 interviewees (82%) as a key dimension of customer engagement. As stated before, the interviewees highlight the importance of the emotional bonds established between the hotel and the guests that are enabled, especially, by the human relationships between hotels employees and customers. As stated by Participant P5 "We deliver meals, rooms, but mainly relationships". For Participant P9 "Only the teams can add emotion with a smile, with empathy and care that machines do not have". Participant P3 reinforces that "We try to create a strong relationship" and Participant P11 considers that "Customer engagement results from this perception that the guest is coming back to a place where he/she is known, where he/she has already had a good experience, where everybody knows what he/she likes and needs". For Participant P1, "What luxury brands do in an extraordinary manner is to position themselves and create a relationship with customers that is

purely emotional…And why is this relationship the focus of luxury brands? Because the functional part, meaning, to have an excellent bed or an extraordinary F&B service is already a given".

Although the emotional side is the most referred by the interviewees, 2 respondents (18%) also raise the attention to a more intellectual aspect of engagement. For instance, for Participant P6 a customer can relate to a brand due to more emotional or more intellectual aspects and for Participant P11 a customer who, during the stay, wants to know the hotel history or have more knowledge about the region or the local activities, is also a sign of engagement.

The level of interaction between the hotel and the customer, online or offline, is also referred as an important dimension as it is perceived as an indicator of customer engagement. This sub-theme is, in fact, referred by 5 interviewees (45%). For instance, Participant P2 reinforces the importance of the interactions that the hotel staff have with the customers during the stay. Moreover, Participants P3, P4, P8 and P11 also recognize the importance of online interactions, mainly through social media, before the stay, during the stay and after the stay. However, Participant P4 draws attention to the analysis of this indicator. In fact, according to Participant P4, one should not infer that a customer is more engaged than another customer only because he/she posts on social media about the brand or follows the brand page. In fact, according to this interviewee, this is a matter of attitude and there are, in fact, satisfied and loyal customers who like to share online their experiences and others who are as satisfied and as loyal, but don´t like to share experiences, nor opinions online.

Finally, the last dimension of engagement is the component of identification. Interviewees mention that customers engage with the brand because they feel identified with it and there is a sense of belonging. This identification characteristic is mentioned by 6 interviewees (55%). One example is shared by Participant P1 who considers that hotels "… are physical spaces where people with similar values can meet. It is almost like a cult space. There are many hotel brands that developed an amazing job creating these communities". Participant P5 states that "There is a sense of family, of belonging" which is also pointed out by Participant P9 and Participant P11. The first-order constructs and the second-order construct "Engagement characteristics", associated with Customer Engagement, and emerging from Q7, are represented in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Engagement characteristics", emerging from Q7, associated with Customer Engagement (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
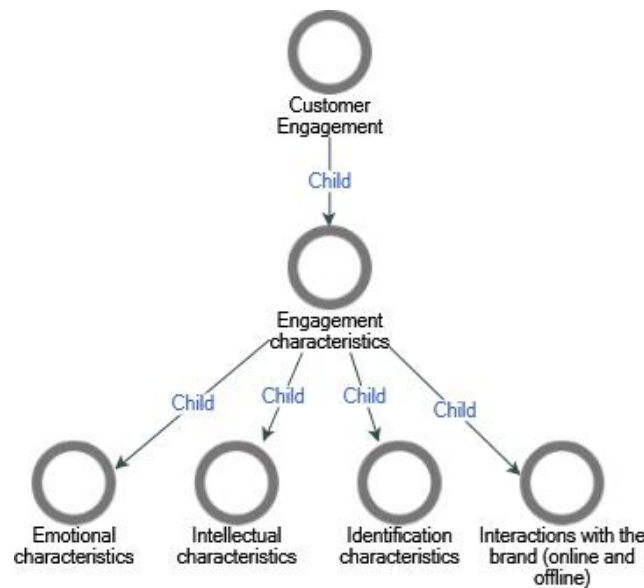
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

When analyzing the second-order constructs associated with Customer Engagement, we realize that the sub-theme of Engagement mechanisms is the one with the highest number of references, in concrete, 61 references (see Table 5.5). The first-order constructs with the highest number of references, also associated with the theme of Customer Engagement are the human element, the emotional characteristics associated with the theme, the customer journey, the interactions with the brand, the role of the online and the engagement target, with 28, 25, 14, 13, 12 and 12 references, respectively (see Figure.5.10). From the frequency of references associated with these sub-themes, we can infer the importance of the human element, as well as the emotional characteristics attached to the engagement topic, from the point of view of hospitality experts.

Table 5.5- Sources and references of second-order constructs, associated with Customer Engagement

Second-order construct	Number of Sources	Number of References
Relevance of engagement	9	19
Engagement mechanisms	11	61
Engagement characteristics	11	49

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Figure 5.10- Number of References of the Top 6 first-order constructs, associated with Customer Engagement
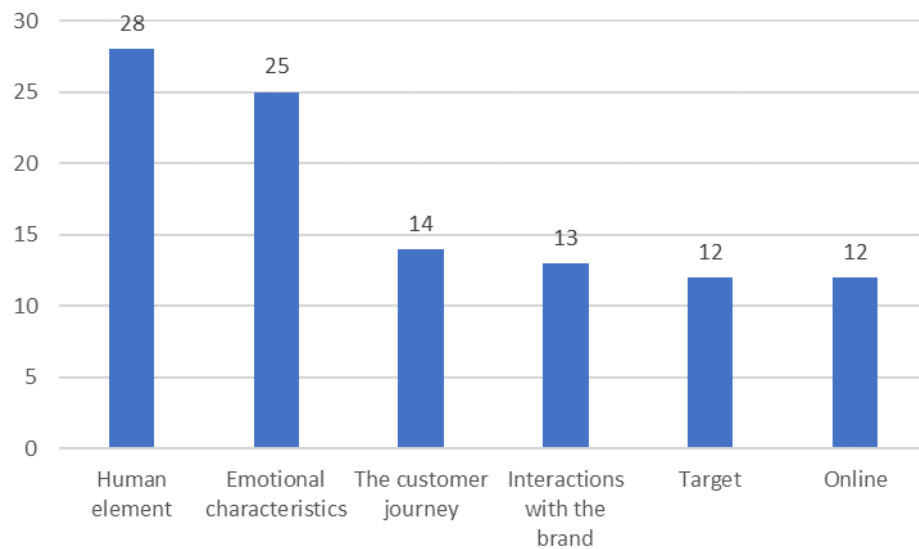
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.3 Brand Authenticity

Another topic covered in the in-depth interviews was the topic of Brand Authenticity. We started by asking the hospitality experts how the authenticity concept could be applied to hotels and what was, in their opinion, an authentic hotel. Then, we moved to the relevance and appropriateness of the concept in the upscale hotel context and we ended up this part of the interview by asking the participants about the type of stimuli, from the internal and external environment of the hotel, that they would consider important to convey a perception of authenticity. Based on the interview questions, we will now present the findings related to the conceptualizations of Brand Authenticity.

Q8- Nowadays, several brands state that they are authentic. Do you think this concept of Authenticity can be applied to hospitality in general and to upscale hotels in particular? How?
Q9- What is an authentic hotel?

Eight sub-themes emerge from Q8 and Q9. When asked to describe and apply authenticity to hotel brands, the respondents associate the authenticity term to Back to Basics, Uniqueness,

Genuineness, Reflecting the brand values, Delivering the brand promise, Integration in the local environment and local culture, Heritage and Consistency.

Integration in the local environment and in the local culture is, in fact, the first-order construct, associated with Brand Authenticity, that is the most referred by the interviewees, being mentioned by 9 respondents (82%) and with 27 references. For the majority of the interviewees, an authentic hotel is integrated in the destination, minimizes its impacts on the community, respects the local culture and creates bonds with the community. Moreover, this integration is reflected on the hotel architecture and/or on the local gastronomy and wines. Participant P2 points out that "…the local element, the relationship with the community and the integration with the destination are becoming more and more appreciated". Furthermore, Participant P5 adds that "For me, authenticity is to respect the culture, the local community, its way of living and being", as well as "…having the lowest impact on the surroundings". For Participant P9, an authentic hotel should offer its guests "…the possibility to leave experiences that can only be lived in that place", transforming those experiences in unique experiences. Moreover, Participant P3 mentions that the hotel interior design, the architecture, the decoration with details of the region, the local experiences and the local products, help to convey this sense of authenticity. Participant P6 adds that an authentic hotel respects the environment.

The term authenticity is also associated with uniqueness and genuineness by 5 (45%) and 6 interviewees (55%), respectively. Participant P9 explains that if a hotel is able to provide an experience to a guest that can only be lived in that place, the guest will want to come back because this experience is authentic, unique, while Participant P11 points out that "… luxury is to provide experiences that are unique, authentic, true, real". Concerning the genuine aspect of authenticity, genuineness seems to be applied as a synonym of sincerity, truth and naturalness. Participant P2 considers that "Authenticity is something that is easier to do, than to explain. It is doing something in a genuine way, without being forced to do it or because there is a check list of things to do", "it is something spontaneous". Participant P11 considers that "We say that something is authentic because it has not been produced for tourists". For Participant P1 "What makes the difference is being true".

Delivering the brand promise and reflecting the brand values are also characteristics of authenticity that emerge from the interviews, referred by 2 (18%) and 3 (27%) interviewees, respectively. For Participant P1, an authentic brand "…is a brand that promises something and delivers that" and for Participant P7 a brand is authentic when their products and services reflect the brand values. Participants P10 and P11 argue that a brand is authentic if it doesn´t pretend to be something that it is not.

Authenticity is also associated with simplicity, back to basics, by 3 of the interviewees (27%). They consider that this simplicity related to the essence can also be found even in hotels with a high-end positioning like luxury hotels. Participant P1 argues that "Authenticity is also going back to the roots, the origins. In other words, simplicity in luxury, with comfort but no excesses. Luxury can have this side more related to the origins, but can also have a more "bling bling" side with ultra-sophistication. There are customers for both positionings".

Another sub-theme that comes out is heritage, associated with authenticity. It is referred by 6 interviewees (55%). Within this sub-theme, two different perspectives seem to emerge among the interviewees. On the one hand, some participants link authenticity to past heritage, especially in the case of historic hotels and, on the other hand, there are respondents who defend that an upscale hotel can be authentic even if it is modern, innovative, with no link to the past. On the one hand, Participant P11, reflecting about authenticity, states that "Authenticity is to praise the past" and Participant P5, while describing a specific authentic situation, mentions that "…the oven was from that specific time period, as well as the recipes, cooked in slow motion, with flavors from the past, in a very simple and not sophisticated place". On the other hand, Participant P4 states that "Societies evolve. Being authentic is not being constantly coming back to the past. It´s not authentic because it´s old. Societies, nowadays, are authentic" and adds that "Many times there is confusion within the authenticity discussion because authenticity should not be confused with topics of retro, vintage or coming back to the past". This perspective is shared by Participant P7 who states that "I am a bit against the concept of authenticity without innovation".

Consistency is also referred as an important characteristic of authenticity, pointed out by 3 interviewees (27%). Consistency among the brand values, the guest service and all the other elements is considered a sign of authenticity in these participants´ point of view.

Finally, the second-order construct identified as challenges, also emerges from the in-depth interviewees, associated with the topic of authenticity. In fact, a key challenge pointed out by 3 interviewees (27%) is to find the right balance between operational procedures that are required in hospitality and the employees´ authenticity. This is reflected on the words of Participant P4 who states that "Many times the standardization of the services constrains the authenticity of the speech". Participant P3 considers that "When there is an excess of procedures, an excess of rules, it is likely that we deliver a more automatized service…We need to find a balance between the two situations. We need to have an operation that is efficient and, at the same time, to have a team that is prepared from the extraordinary, to be able to act upon situations that are not predicted and included in the procedures". Participant P8 considers that "We need to

balance the destination authenticity and how to welcome the guests with a minimum level of procedures". The first-order constructs and the second-order constructs "Authenticity characteristics" and "challenges", associated with Brand Authenticity, emerging from Q8 and Q9, are represented in Figure 5.11.

Figure 5.11- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "Authenticity characteristics" and "challenges", emerging from Q8 and Q9, associated with Brand Authenticity (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
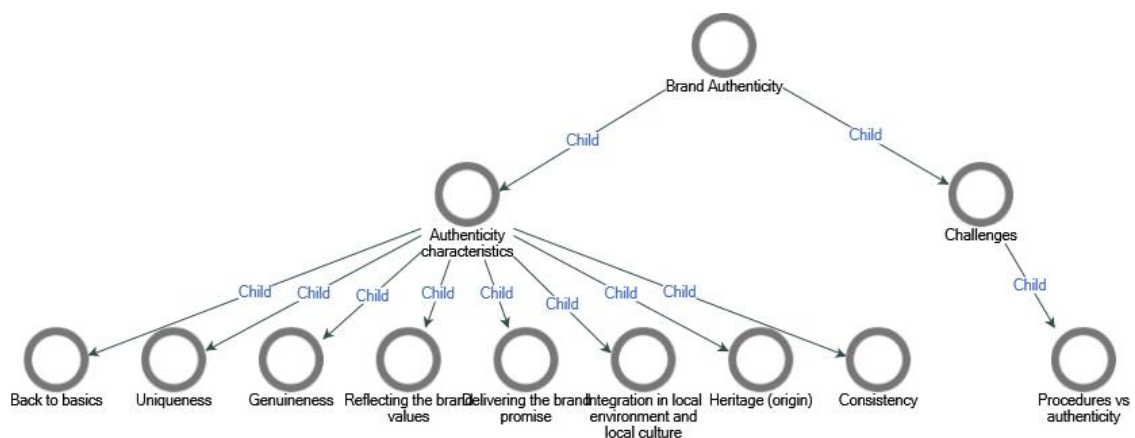
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q10- Do you think that a hotel should be authentic? Why?
Q11- Do guests value that? Why?

The relevance of authenticity is a sub-theme that derives from Q10 and Q11. Nine interviewees (82%) addressed this sub-topic and what comes out is that the participants consider that authenticity is very important. However, depending on the interpretation applied to the concept, the level of relevance can vary. For Participant P10, a hotel being authentic is very important because it is the best way to ensure differentiation and, in this Participant´s point of view, the main interpretation is that an authentic hotel is a hotel that delivers the brand promise and leaves upon its values and mission. Participant P11 considers that the search for authenticity is a trend in luxury hotels because consumers have been looking for what is authentic, unique, for experiences that can only be found in a specific place and, therefore, are unrepeatable, although there is still luxury that is not authentic. Participant P3 and Participant P1 also think that authenticity is a trend of the sector and Participant P5 agrees that authenticity is highly appreciated by guests. However, when authenticity is perceived as being linked to heritage,

history and local culture, some interviewees state that not all the guests value and look for this in a hotel. For instance, Participant P7, while referring to the luxury segment, states that "There are customers who chose the most expensive product and others who look mainly for what is extraordinary". Finally, Participant P4 also states that "If I think of authenticity being linked to historic elements, local culture and heritage, then it is variable. There are customers for whom this is not the main motivation of the trip". The first-order construct and the second-order construct "Relevance of authenticity", associated with Brand Authenticity, emerging from Q10 and Q11, are represented in Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12- First-order construct and second-order construct "Relevance of authenticity", emerging from Q10 and Q11, associated with Brand Authenticity (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Q12- What kind of stimuli, from the internal and external environment of the hotel, do you consider to be relevant cues for authenticity?

When asked about the elements that are relevant to convey a perception of authenticity, two sub-themes come out: the human element and atmospheric elements. In fact, these elements are very similar to the ones referred in the Brand Experience part. The human element and the other elements are both referred by 9 interviewees (82%).

The human element refers to the hotel employees who are considered by the interviewees as a vehicle of authenticity. The way the hotel employees welcome the guests, their link to the region and the way they interact with guests are also considered by participants as a vehicle to convey authenticity. Moreover, the role of employees´ training and employees´ empowerment is also considered relevant for the authenticity topic. Participant P4 states that "This fundamental element of Human Resources and the simplicity and autonomy in the speech also enable this perception of hotel authenticity". Participant P2 points out that "The guests value that because they increasingly look for this human factor". Participant P5 considers that "The guest service comes out in a natural way because this is how the hotel employees are and this conveys naturalness, authenticity to the guest service". Participant P3 defends that everybody who work in the front of the house of the hotel need to know how the hotel works, need to know the region where the hotel is integrated and, at the same time, be herself/himself as a person, as a human being. Participants P3 and P11 also recognize the importance of having hotel employees who are from the region. For Participant P11 "The Human Resources, the people who work in the hotel, the majority of them have strong links to the region and I consider that this is also part of the experience", because "When a person visits this region and comes to a hotel like ours, he/she also wants to know the people and I think this is related to authenticity". The importance of having a natural, authentic smile when receiving the guests in the hotel is also mentioned by Participants P1 and P5.

Besides the human element, other elements of the internal and external environment of the hotel are considered important because while getting in contact with these stimuli, customers create perceptions about authenticity. In fact, 9 interviewees (82%) refer to these elements. For instance, to have hotel amenities that are related to the region or aligned with the brand positioning, or to have a scent that is linked to the region or to the brand positioning are some elements that are pointed out as relevant. The hotel architecture and the hotel decoration are recognized as important cues of authenticity by 6 interviewees (55%), respectively. For instance, for Participant P11, "Authenticity can also be perceived trough the hotel architecture. The architecture of our hotel is based on what existed before. Everything was rehabilitation" and Participant P6 states that "We would not interfere with the building architecture. We wanted to respect it, to respect the origins of that building". Participant P8, referring to authenticity, states that "Many times it is a challenge because it impacts the building architecture, the construction, the building landscaping…It implies that the concept is local, with local materials that are many times hard to get and more expensive, and local architecture". Concerning the decoration, having decoration elements like furniture, pictures or materials that tell a story, that

are linked to the hotel history or linked to the local culture and materials is also something that is highlighted by the respondents. The elements of design, music and Food & Beverages are also addressed. In the case of Food & Beverages, the importance of presenting guests the local products, from the region, is something that is raised by 5 interviewees (45%). The first-order constructs and the second-order constructs "Human element" and "Other elements (atmospherics)", associated with Brand Authenticity, emerging from Q12, are represented in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "Human element" and "Other elements (atmospherics)" emerging from Q12, associated with Brand Authenticity (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
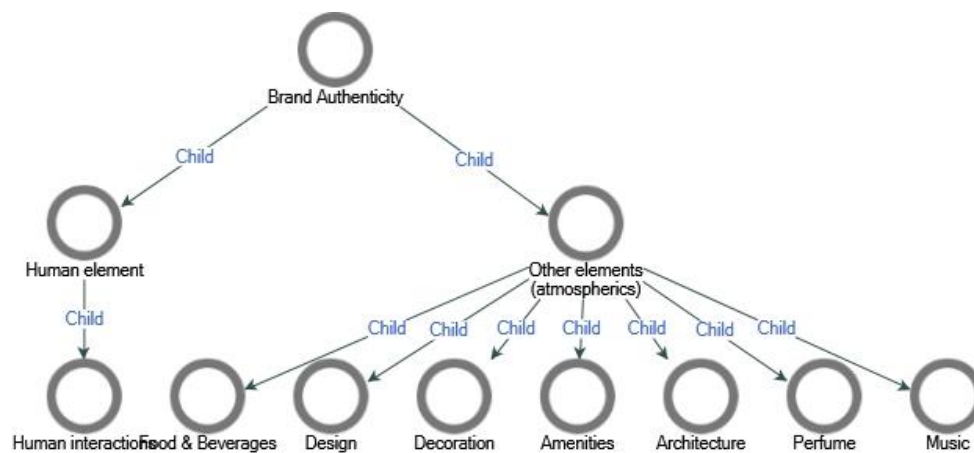
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

When analyzing the second-order constructs associated with Brand Authenticity, we realize that the sub-theme of Authenticity characteristics is the one with the highest number of references, in concrete, 87 references (see Table 5.6). The first-order constructs with the highest number of references, also associated with the theme of Brand Authenticity are the integration in local environment and local culture, human interactions, heritage, level of relevance, uniqueness and genuineness (see Figure.5.14), highlighting the relevance of these sub-themes within the context of Brand Authenticity.

Table 5.6- Sources and references of second-order constructs, associated with Brand Authenticity

Second-order construct	Number of Sources	Number of References
Relevance of authenticity	9	17
Authenticity characteristics	11	87
Human elements	9	24
Other elements (atmospherics)	9	36
Challenges	3	5

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Figure 5.14- Number of References of the Top 6 first-order constructs, associated with Brand Authenticity
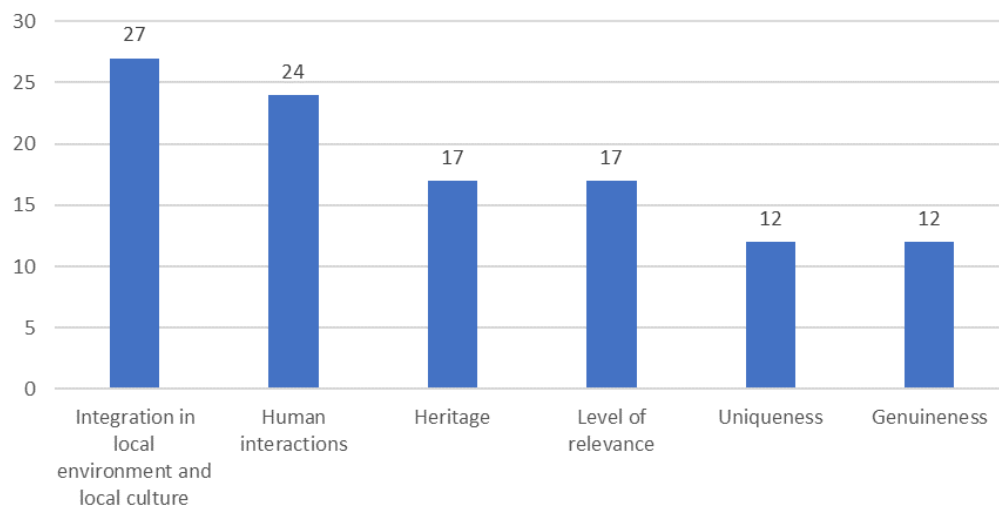
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.4 Relationships among the concepts

The fourth theme covered in the in-depth interviews was the possible relationships among the concepts of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity. Next, we present the findings associated with this topic that emerged along the interview and more directly from question 13 (Q13).

Q13- In the context of an upscale hotel, how do you think the concepts of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Customer Authenticity relate to each other?

When asked about possible relationships among the concepts, some of the interviewees answered that it was hard to give a straightforward answer. This feeling was not only verbally expressed, but also reflected on their body language. Seven interviewees (64%) identify possible relationships among the constructs. A transversal conclusion, common to three of the interviewees is that experience is what comes first. For instance, Participant P11 states "This question is not easy to answer. It´s very abstract. Engagement and experience are highly connected because if the experience is positive, there is a higher engagement and if the experience is negative there is less engagement. There is a correlation. Regarding authenticity, it´s more difficult. I think authenticity is highly related to the experience and with what the customer feels and knows, and it will contribute to the engagement. In other words, engagement is a post state. If we had to put it in a timeline, I would say that first there is the experience, authenticity is inside the experience and the customer engagement comes after because the customer has to go through the experience to be engaged". Participant P5 says that "If I had to make a statement, I would say that authentic experiences contribute to a higher engagement. There is nothing worse than a fake experience". The first-order construct and the second-order construct "Mechanism", associated with the theme Relationships among the constructs, emerging mainly from Q13, are represented in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15- First-order construct and second-order construct "Mechanism" emerging mainly from Q13, associated with Relationships among the constructs (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
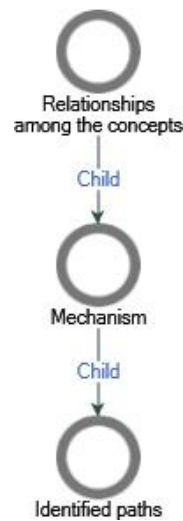
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.5 Outcomes

Another objective of this study was to identify the outcomes that are important for managers in this sector and in this type of hotels. In this vein, and to link the desired outcomes with the constructs under study, we asked the interviewees what they considered to be the main outcomes when a hotel is able to provide a memorable experience, is perceived as being authentic and is able to create a relationship with guests. Based on that, we will now discuss the findings associated with this sub-theme.

Q14- What do you consider to be the main outcomes when an upscale hotel is able to provide a memorable experience, is perceived as being authentic and is able to create a relationship with its guests?

When asked about the desired outcomes, three sub-themes emerge from the in-depth interviews: attitudinal outcomes, behavioral outcomes and financial outcomes. The behavioral outcomes stand out as the most important, being acknowledged by 10 interviewees (91%), with 49 references. The behavioral outcomes are organized in four sub-themes (first-order constructs): recommendation, positive Word of Mouth (online and offline), return (repurchase) and brand ambassadors. From these, the likelihood to return is the behavioral outcome that is more often

mentioned (22 references) and by more interviewees (9 interviewees; 82%). In fact, the participants consider that when a hotel is able to provide memorable experiences, is perceived as being authentic and maintains a relationship with its guests, it is very likely that the guests come back for future vacations or business purposes. Moreover, 6 interviewees (55%) consider that the memorable experiences, the perception of authenticity and a high level of engagement can also lead to Positive Word of Mouth (WOM), being it online or offline, and 4 interviewees (36%) refer recommendations as another outcome.

When the interviewees describe the desired outcomes, in several references they mention loyalty as a concept that aggregates positive WOM, recommendations and customer return/ repurchase. For instance, Participant P2 says that "I believe that when we deliver this type of experiences and we know that a customer is satisfied, when he/she leaves, usually says that he/she is very pleased and already books the next stay in the hotel" and Participant P5 states "This is what happens with luxury customers. They become loyal to the brand and to specific hotels". Another example is mentioned by Participant P9 who says that "This is what we all want- to create emotions that are imprinted in the guest´s memory. We are producing extraordinary moments, and these will make customers return to the hotel and recommend the hotel, in other words, they become the hotel prescribers". Participant P7 also states that loyalty is the main outcome, meaning "…the customer returns or gives positive feedback about the hotel".

Although loyalty is described by several interviewees as a key outcome, two participants seem not to dissociate these behavioral outcomes of return/ repurchase, positive WOM and recommendation, from the engagement concept. This seems to be reflected in the words of Participant P11 who mentions that "Another type of engagement is customers who come back to the hotel on special dates. For instance, they choose our hotel to celebrate their wedding anniversary or to celebrate their children´s birthday. In other words, to celebrate important moments of their life" and adds that "Another thing that we realize is that there are customers who, while doing the check out, already book their next stay in the hotel. The guest does not want to leave and is already thinking about his/her next stay. This is clearly engagement". In the same line of though, Participant P4 defends that "I think engagement is not only to ensure that the guests return for another stay, but also say positive things about the hotel".

The positive WOM transmitted by the satisfied customer is also recognized as a very important outcome. The interviewees also refer that this positive WOM can be shared online, through social media or in websites, personally (offline) to friends and family and in Whatsapp groups. Besides positive WOM, a recommendation from a guest is considered highly valuable,

as it is recognized by Participant P1 who considers that "A recommendation from a satisfied, ultra-satisfied, surprised guest is much more valuable than a typical marketing campaign done by the hotel". This opinion is also shared by Participant P10 who mentions that a recommendation from a friend or the family is highly credible.

Finally, 5 interviewees (45%) refer that customers can also become brand ambassadors, when they have memorable experiences, when they perceive a hotel as authentic and are highly engaged with the brand.

Satisfaction is an attitudinal behavior that is also directly mentioned by 4 interviewees (36%) as an important outcome that leads to behavioral outcomes. In fact, 4 participants mention that satisfied customers return, say positive things about the hotel and make recommendations. For instance, Participant P5 states that "When there is a high level of satisfaction, customers tend to repeat the experiences and I believe that the level of repetition is higher when the experience is highly valued".

A lower price sensitivity and a lower need of marketing investment are also associated with loyal customers. Four interviewees (36%) refer these as important outcomes, considering that a loyal customer is less price sensitive, compared to a non-loyal customer. Moreover, interviewees also recognized that the level of investment required to capture new customers is higher than to maintain loyal customers. The first-order constructs and the second-order constructs "Behavioral outcomes", "Attitudinal outcomes" and "Financial outcomes", associated with the Outcomes theme, emerging mainly from Q14, are represented in Figure 5.16.

Figure 5.16- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "Behavioral outcomes", "Attitudinal outcomes" and "Financial outcomes", emerging mainly from Q14, associated with Outcomes (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
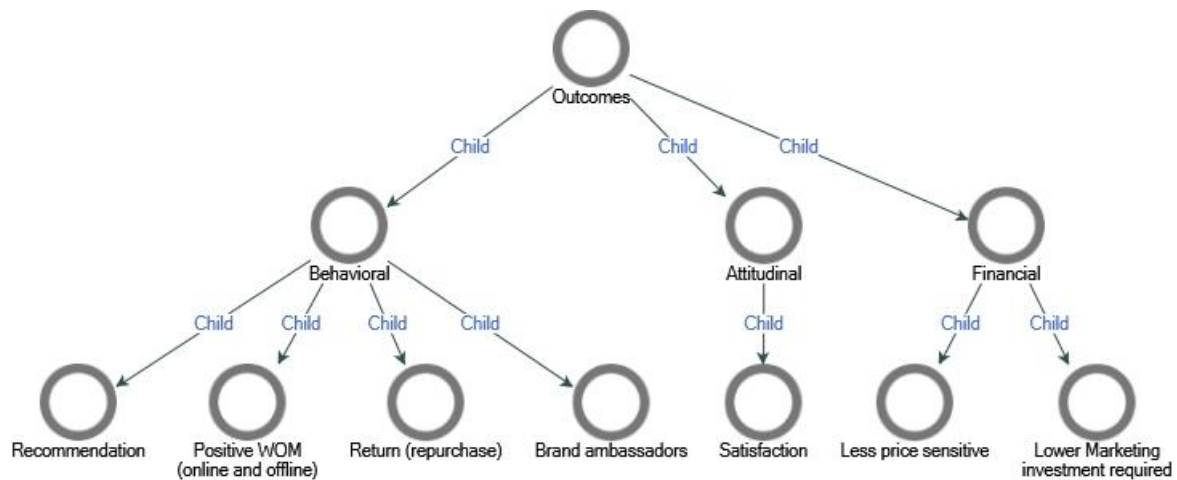
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.3.6 COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19

The last topic covered in the in-depth interviews was COVID-19 and post-COVID-19, as we wanted to understand how hospitality experts perceived the global "new reality", imposed by COVID-19 pandemic situation. Moreover, we wanted to gain insights about how this pandemic situation could impact the sector and the relevance of the topics under study, in the short and in the long run. Associated with this main topic, three sub-themes emerge: COVID-19 impacts on the sector, main factors to ensure guest´s confidence in hotels and the impact of COVID-19 on the analyzed constructs, namely, Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity. Based on the interview questions that directly addressed this theme, we will now discuss the main findings.

Q15- How do you imagine Tourism and, in concrete, Hospitality after COVID-19?
Q16- During this pandemic period, what do you consider to be the main factors that would make guests feel confident when they return to a hotel?
Q17- Do you think that Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity will continue to be relevant post-COVID-19?

From the sub-theme COVID-19 impacts on the sector, mentioned by 9 interviewees (82%), five first-order constructs come out: new characteristics of traveling and stays, the human element, the need to travel, technology and financial resilience.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation on the tourism and hospitality sectors, in the short term, is considered to be very high and 4 interviewees (36%) mention that only firms that have financial resilience will be able to survive this crisis. Moreover, this pandemic situation, in the short run, has changed the characteristics of traveling and stays, mainly associated with the traveling restrictions. Shorter vacations, closer destinations, destinations with low population density and the quest for nature destinations are referred as current trends. For instance, Participant P5 states that "People will go for shorter vacations and closer destinations" and Participant P3 highlights that "The need to value the nature aspects, the go green, environmental projects. I think this is very important. When we talk about green recovery, I think this is an extremely important topic. Let´s transform this negative moment that the world is leaving with this pandemic situation, into a positive thing". Despite all the adversities, 3 interviewees (27%) clearly defend that the need to travel is there, and believe that when it will be possible to travel again without restrictions, people will do it. For Participant P5 "To travel is an aspiration and, nowadays, it is no longer considered as something superfluous. It has been incorporated in the consumer habits and it is now considered an essential good…I think there will be a boom afterwards because people want to feel they recovered their normal lives". Participant P9 considers that "The human nature is curious, and I believe that people will continue to travel, to look for experiences, to discover, to know the world".

The incorporation of technology during this pandemic period has also been acknowledged by 2 interviewees (18%). These participants consider that the technological developments that have been implemented during this period are likely to stay as they have several benefits for hotels and for customers. Besides the relevance of technology, the human element is still considered to be very important even in a time of post-COVID-19 and this is mentioned by 5 interviewees (45%). Participant P2 states that "What I think will have an even more important role is the human factor. The care, the attention that we will have, in order to ensure the safety of our guests, it is also an attitude of affection and care". For Participant P5, "If there was something that was reinforced in this crisis, this would be the human relationships. The realization that our individual decisions can damage the collective". Within this line of thought, Participant P1 argues that "The more digital we become, the higher the human impact and the need of the human element. There is no better time to talk about this, after the lockdowns. What

is that we all miss? The human touch. I think this crisis puts the need of the human touch on the top of priorities".

The main factors referred to ensure guests´ confidence in hotels, during and after the pandemic situation are the safety and security procedures implemented by the hotels and, in particular, the upscale hotels, the vaccine for COVID-19 and the confidence on the brand. Nine interviewees (82%) refer that the application of all the safety and security procedures to protect guests´ health is key to ensure that hotels are a safe environment. Moreover, 2 interviewees (18%) also refer that the vaccine will be very important to accelerate the end of the pandemic situation and other 2 interviewees (18%) mention the importance of customer confidence on the hotel brand. For instance, Participant P11 explains that after the lockdown the first clients to make hotel reservations were the loyal customers and customers to whom the hotel had been recommended.

All the interviewees answered the question related to the impact of COVID-19 on the relevance of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity in the upscale hotel context. For 5 of them (45%), these concepts will become even more relevant after the pandemic situation. Participant P5 says that "Experience, authenticity and engagement will be reinforced" and will continue to be "…a critical element of differentiation for the destinations". For Participant P2 "These factors will continue to be important. I think they will become even more relevant". Finally, Participant P11 considers that these topics will increase relevance in the context of upscale hotels and argues that "Concerning authenticity, I think this pandemic crisis demonstrated that the more basic things that we used to give for granted, are the most wanted. Nature, the small things, the birds, are more valued now as many people had to stay at their places, many of them in cities and in small apartments, without going out. Small things, authentic things, assume now a more relevant role because they have been taken away due to the pandemic situation". Participant P11 also considers that the role of experience becomes reinforced because "…when customers realized they could travel, they thought about going to places where they had had a good experience", as well as the role of customer engagement. In fact, Participant P11 also explains that, due to the health situation, the hotel had to implement several additional safety procedures that were very well accepted because the guests were engaged with the brand and realized that these procedures were implemented to protect their health. The first-order constructs and the second-order constructs "COVID-19 impacts on the sector", "Main factors to ensure guest´s confidence in hotels" and "The impact of COVID-19 on the analyzed constructs", associated with COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 theme, emerging mainly from Q15, Q16, and Q17 are represented in Figure 5.17.

Figure 5.17- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "COVID-19 impacts on the sector", "Main factors to ensure guest´s confidence in hotels" and "The impact of COVID-19 on the analyzed constructs", emerging mainly from Q15, Q16 and Q17, associated with COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
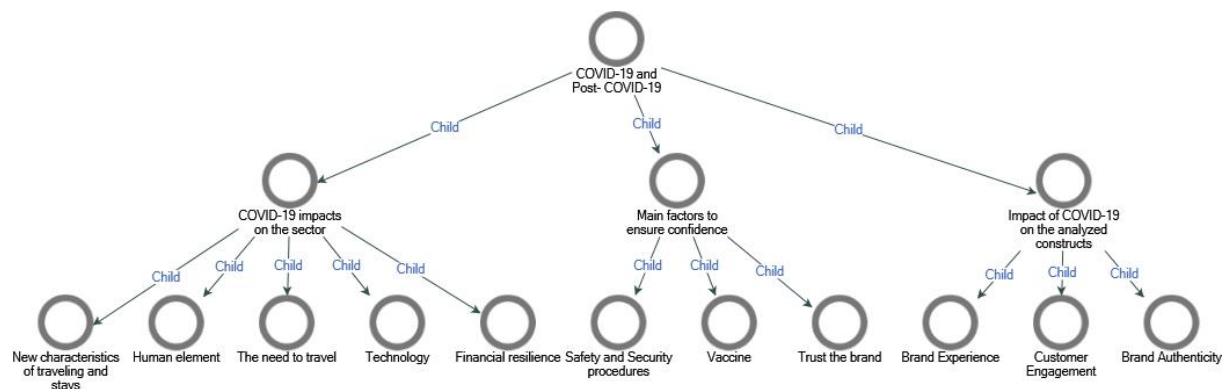
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

5.4 Discussion of the findings

Next, we discuss the findings related to the main topics emerging from this study. Concerning the theme of Brand Experience, it is recognized by all the interviewees that the experience lived by a guest in a hotel is particularly important. This is, in fact, in line with the literature. Schmitt (1999), as well as Pine and Gilmore (1998) were some of the first scholars who have addressed the importance of customer experience in today´s society. Pine and Gilmore (1998) state that as goods and services are becoming commoditized, experiences are becoming more relevant and recognize that the economy is, in fact, an experience economy. In the particular context of hotels, it has also been stated in the literature that the experience economy is highly relevant because there is a high level of involvement from customers during the purchase and consumption of this kind of service (Manthiou et al., 2016).

The majority of the interviewees also recognize that an upscale hotel needs to deliver experiences that are unique and memorable, and this is also acknowledged in the literature. For example, it is stated that "An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 98).

Another sub-theme referred by the interviewees is that hotel managers need to pay attention to the experience that comes along the customer journey, highlighting that the experience starts in the pre-stay, occurs during the stay and also exists in the post-stay. These findings are

consistent with the literature. In fact, it is recognized that "Understanding customer experience and the customer journey over time is critical for firms" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 69). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) consider that there is a growing importance of customer experience, also resulting from the fact that nowadays customers interact with firms through different touchpoints, in different channels and media, which makes the customers journey more complex to manage. Moreover, another finding to address is the role of guest service, acknowledged by the majority of the respondents. Guest service and, in concrete, the importance of service quality to ensure the success of a hotel in today´s competitive environment, has also been recognized in the literature (e.g. Akbaba, 2006).

Concerning the experience characteristics that have spontaneously been pointed out during the interviews performed, four sub-themes have emerged: sensorial, emotional, learning and transformational characteristics. These characteristics are consistent with the experience dimensions found in the literature, although not all the dimensions referred in the literature are acknowledged by the interviewees. According to the majority of the interviewees, the experience in an upscale hotel is connected to the five senses (sensorial) and also to feelings and emotions (emotional). A fewer number of interviewees (18%) associate it with learning something from the experience (learning) and one interviewee highlights the role of transformational experiences which are experiences that help to transform customers, either physically or psychologically. In the literature, different dimensions of experience are also identified. Schmitt (1999) addresses the topic of Experiential Marketing and defends that consumers are rational and emotional human beings who look for pleasurable experiences and defends that marketers can create five different types of experiences or strategic experiential modules (SEMs): sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT) and social or relational experiences (RELATE). The sensorial, emotional and learning characteristics are consistent with the dimensions of Sense, Feel and Think articulated by Schmitt (1999). The Act dimension concerns enriching "customers´ lives by targeting their physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things (e.g. in business-to-business or industrial markets), alternative lifestyles and interactions" (Schmitt, 1999, p. 62). This dimension is somehow related to the transformational characteristic of experience, mentioned in the interviews.

Several conceptualizations of customer experience can be found in the literature and, in the concrete case of brand experience, it is defined as the "…sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and

identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 52). These authors also develop a brand experience scale that comprises four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. In fact, one can state that the sensorial, emotional and learning characteristics relate to the sensory, affective and intellectual dimensions included in this brand experience scale. Manthiou et al. (2016) apply this scale to the hotel context and conclude that these four aspects of sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral are supported in a hotel context.

Regarding the stimuli considered important to provide the desired experience to guests, the human element (hotel staff), as well as atmospheric elements (design, facilities and amenities, decoration, architecture, food & beverages, colors and light, perfume) have been identified by the respondents. This is consistent with some of the stimuli articulated in the literature within tourism and hospitality. For instance, Walls (2013) concludes that the two dimensions of experience under study (physical environment and human interactions) have a significant and positive relationship with perceived value. Elements like design, architecture, decoration, as well as the staff attentiveness, professionalism, reliability, and guest-to guest relations are found to impact the hotel experience (Walls, 2013).

The second topic covered in the interviews is Customer Engagement. The majority of the interviewees recognize the relevance of the topic considering that it is important to maintain a relationship, a bond with customers. These findings are consistent with the literature that recognizes the growing importance of customer engagement for firms (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Islam & Rahman, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), especially in a time characterized by social media and technological developments (Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Another sub-theme related to customer engagement are engagement characteristics. The findings emerging from the in-depth interviews show that respondents tend to refer to four different characteristics associated with engagement: emotional, intellectual, identification and interaction characteristics. The emotional characteristics are the most referred characteristics, mentioned by 82% of the interviewees. Participants consider that emotional bonds are established between the brand and the hotels, mainly enabled by the hotel employees who are able to develop this relationship with guests. Moreover, the intellectual aspect, as well as the interaction between the customers and the hotel, being it online or offline and the identification aspect (sense of belonging) also come out from the interviews performed. These characteristics find a parallel in the customer engagement literature and, in particular, in the customer engagement dimensions identified in the literature review. In fact, past research presents several multidimensional perspectives of the engagement construct where cognitive, emotional,

behavioral and even the social dimension are the most referred (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016; Gambetti et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2011a). Therefore, we could state that the emotional characteristics highlighted by the interviewees are in line with the affective/ emotional dimension referred in the literature, while the intellectual characteristics are more related to the cognitive dimension of engagement and the interaction (between the hotel and the guests) resembles the behavioral and social dimensions mentioned in the literature. Within the hospitality industry, So et al. (2014) have developed a scale comprising the dimensions of identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction to measure customer engagement. Based on the referred article, the emotional characteristics coming from the interviews resonates with the enthusiasm dimension, the intellectual characteristics are related to the attention dimension, the interactions between the brand and the guests connect to the interaction dimension and, finally, the identification characteristic (sense of belonging) resonates with the identification dimension presented by So et al. (2014).

Concerning the engagement mechanisms, the human element is considered a key factor of engagement, referred by 82% of interviewees. From the literature review performed, we realize that the role of the human element (the firm employees) is also recognized by Kumar and Pansari (2016) who define engagement "…as the attitude, behaviour, the level of connectedness (1) among customers, (2) between customer and employees, and (3) of customers and employees within a firm" (Kumar & Pansari, 2016, p. 498). Another important mechanism pointed out by the majority of the participants are the online interactions between the hotel and the guests, based, for instance, on social media. The importance of technology and online interactions between the firm and customers are also widely recognized in the literature, for instance, in the studies of Gambetti et al. (2012), Hollebeek et al. (2014) and So et al. (2016). Finally, 73% of interviewees also refer that it is particularly important to maintain the interactions with customers during the customer journey and these findings are also consistent with what is articulated in the literature. For instance, Islam and Rahman (2016) defend that firms should engage their customers at all possible touchpoints.

The third topic covered in the interviews is Brand Authenticity. The relevance of the concept is referred by 82% of the interviewees who recognize authenticity as a very important concept. However, it is also stated that level of relevance can vary depending on the interpretation applied to the concept. This importance of authenticity in contemporary society is also mirrored in the literature. According to Gilmore and Pine (2007), the decision to buy a specific offering is, many times, based on how real, authentic, the offering is perceived to be.

Moreover, in the concrete case of the marketing field, the consumers´ quest for authenticity is considered "one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 21).

One sub-theme that emerges from the interviews is related to the authenticity characteristics. Interviewees relate hotel authenticity with aspects like: Back to Basics, Uniqueness, Genuineness, Reflecting the brand values, Delivering the brand promise, Integration in the local environment and local culture, Heritage and Consistency. While analyzing the literature developed in different contexts (industries), we conclude that many of the findings emerging from the interviews are consistent with what is articulated in the literature, although some differences are also found. Firstly, some interviewees associate an authentic hotel to a hotel that is genuine and/ or unique. This is, in fact, a common understanding that is expressed in the literature because the concept of authenticity is many times associated with being genuine, true, sincere, as presented, for instance, in the studies of Fine (2003) and Napoli et al. (2014). In the case of the unique aspect of authenticity, it is mirrored, for example, in the dimension of originality that is presented by Bruhn et al. (2012) and Akbar and Wymer (2017). Secondly, other interviewees associate an authentic hotel to a hotel that is able to reflect the brand values and/ or deliver its brand promise. These factors are also referred by Dwivedi and McDonald (2018) and Fritz et al. (2017). Thirdly, the heritage factor is also referred by 55% of the interviewees. It is also recognized in the literature as an important attribute, for instance, in the studies of Beverland (2006) and Choi et al. (2015). However, different points of view related to whether authenticity should (or not) be related to heritage, come out from the interviews. A similar discussion is held by Guèvremont (2018) who concludes that brand authenticity perceptions can be connected to young brands, defending that brand longevity is not a requirement to ensure brand authenticity. Fourthly, the aspect of consistency, also referred by the respondents, is similar to the dimension of continuity presented, for instance, by Bruhn et al. (2012) and Morhart et al. (2015). Finally, from the literature review performed, the aspects of back to basics and integration in the local environment and local culture (the most referred authenticity characteristic in the interviews), don´t seem to have been much explored so far. In the literature review performed we find relationship to place as an important attribute (e.g. Beverland, 2006) and country of origin/ territory of origin as an antecedent of product authenticity (e.g. Zhang & Merunka, 2015), but not the characteristic of integration in the local environment and culture, defended by the interviewees.

Concerning the stimuli that hospitality experts consider relevant cues for authenticity, two different types of elements are mentioned: the human element and atmospheric elements. Firstly, the hotel employees who are perceived by the interviewees as a vehicle of authenticity.

The way the hotel employees welcome the guests, their link to the region and the way they interact with guests are also considered by participants as a vehicle to convey authenticity. This perspective is close to the concept of employee authenticity explored in the literature (e.g., Sirianni et al., 2013). Secondly, the atmospheric elements recognized by respondents as a way to convey a perception of authenticity can also find a parallel in the literature. In fact, within the authenticity literature there are studies that analyze how indexical and iconic cues can act as antecedents of authenticity. For instance, the studies of Carsana and Jolibert (2018) and Grayson and Martinec (2004) conclude that iconic and indexical cues influence the perception of authenticity in the context of Private Labels and tourist attractions, respectively.

The possible relationship among the concepts is the fourth topic covered in the interviews. Although respondents have emphasized that these relationships can be ambiguous, a finding that seems to be transversal among the interviewees who directly answered the question is that experience is what "comes first". In fact, it is stated that customer engagement can only be achieved after the guests have lived the hotel experience. In other words, experience can be perceived as an antecedent of engagement. This finding is also aligned with the literature, as experience has been widely studied as an antecedent of engagement (e.g., Hepola et al., 2017; Merrilees, 2016).

The fifth topic covered in the interviews are the outcomes likely to occur when a hotel delivers memorable experiences, is perceived as being authentic and creates engagement with its guests. The findings point out to three main outcomes: attitudinal, behavioral and financial outcomes. The behavioral outcomes stand out as the most important, being acknowledged by 91% of interviewees. Recommendation, positive WOM, return/ repurchase and guests becoming brand ambassadors are the desired final outcomes. When a guest returns to the hotel, recommends it and says positive things about the hotel, the guest is perceived as being loyal. These findings are consistent with the literature that has also widely analyzed these outcomes as consequences of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity (e.g., Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Lu et al., 2015). However, findings point out two different perspectives among respondents. On the one hand, these behavioral outcomes are perceived by some interviewees as a result of experience, engagement and authenticity perceptions. On the other hand, these behavioral components are considered by others as an important element of engagement. These different perspectives about the behavioral scope of engagement are also present in the literature, although the most common view is that the intention to repurchase/ return is a component of loyalty, viewed as a different construct from engagement. In fact, in the literature, the behavioral dimension is more commonly associated

with items of recommendation and WOM, but not intention to repurchase or return (e.g. Dessart et al., 2016; van Doorn et al., 2010). Kumar and Pansari (2016) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) already consider customer purchases as a component of engagement. This fact raises the question of whether either customer engagement or loyalty should be the ultimate goal in any service encounter.

5.5 Conclusions and implications

The purpose of this study is to capture the perspectives of hospitality managers about the constructs under study, namely, brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, in the context of upscale hotels. This study, besides conveying managers´ perspectives, also contributes to fine tune the proposed conceptual model that is tested in Study four.

The growing number of articles published about the topics of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, applied to different industries, around the world, reveal the importance of the topics. From the managerial side, this study findings suggest that these concepts are, in fact, important in the context of upscale hotels. However, managers consider there are differences regarding the relevance of the concepts. Firstly, in the case of the experience concept, it is perceived as extremely important, independently of the type of hotel or the customers´ motivations. Secondly, brand authenticity is also considered relevant and growing its importance in the context of upscale and luxury hotels, although its relevance depends on how the concept is interpreted. Finally, customer engagement is also recognized as highly important, although it cannot be managed as a "one size fits all" as companies and brands need to know their customers to understand how each customer would like to engage with them.

Although there is not a standardized experience in upscale hotels, findings suggest that, regarding this topic, upscale hotels´ goal is to create unique and memorable experiences (especially for customers who travel for leisure), together with delivering guest service excellency. Guest service is, in fact, the first-order construct, associated with brand experience, with the highest number of references. To achieve this, it is key to meet and exceed guests´ expectations, ensure personalization, pay attention to detail and include the surprise element. This is, in fact, coherent with what is found in the literature. Moreover, the hotel role, not only as an experience provider, but also as an experience facilitator, establishing the bridge between hotel guests and the destination, is also recognized.

Concerning the dimensions associated with the constructs, the sensorial, emotional, learning and transformational characteristics are associated with brand experience and the emotional, intellectual, identification and interaction characteristics are associated with customer engagement. These findings are in line with what the literature reveals. However, in the case of upscale hotels, findings point out to the dominance of the emotional dimension of engagement, being the second most referred first-order construct associated with customer engagement. To be able to deliver the emotional experiences and maintain the emotional engagement, the human element (the relationship established between hotel employees and customers) is considered key. This first-order construct presents the highest number of references, associated with customer engagement and it is also the third most referred, associated with brand experience.

Concerning the experience dimensions, the sensorial sphere, together with the emotional dimension emerge as the main dimensions in the upscale setting. For the hotel to be able to deliver this sensorial experience, the role of atmospheric cues is also recognized. This recognition is also found in the literature. Regarding the other dimensions of engagement, namely, interactions and identification (sense of belonging), they also emerge as having an important role. In the case of the interactions between the hotel and the guests, their importance is recognized, whether being online or offline.

In a time where technological developments and social media are increasing their role in consumers´ lives, online mechanisms of engagement are also mentioned as very important to establish engagement. However, findings reveal that online engagement KPIs should be carefully analyzed. In fact, participants consider that inferences about the level of loyalty and customer engagement, based exclusively on how the customer interacts with the brand online, should not be done. Besides the importance of the human element and the online mechanisms to create and maintain engagement, findings also reveal that the experiences and the relationship established between the hotel and the guests should be maintained along the customer journey-before, during and after the stay. This is also suggested in the literature.

Findings about brand authenticity reveal that the dimensions associated with an authentic hotel are: uniqueness, genuineness, reflecting the brand values, delivering the brand promise, integration in local environment and local culture, link to heritage and, in some cases, a link to the essence (back to basics). Moreover, consistency among all aspects is also considered a requirement of authenticity. This characteristic comes out as a transversal element because consistency in the different parts of the experience, throughout the time, in all the brand touchpoints is also perceived as a sign of authenticity. From the literature review performed,

we conclude that all these dimensions of authenticity have been explored by scholars, except the integration in local environment and local culture dimension and back to basics.

Concerning the elements that are considered key to convey a perception of authenticity, the human interactions between the customers and the hotel staff, also emerge as a key element. It has a fundamental role, not only to deliver the desired experiences and to ensure customer engagement, but also to convey authenticity. Other elements (atmospherics) like Food & Beverages, design, decoration, architecture, and perfume, among others, are also recognized as an important vehicle to convey an authentic experience.

Concerning the possible relationships among the concepts and the desired outcomes, from the managers´ point of view, the experience emerges as the first to occur, leading to customer engagement. This relationship is also widely studied in Academia. Moreover, we conclude that the most desired outcomes are behavioral outcomes, namely return/ repurchase, WOM, recommendations and guests becoming brand ambassadors. These outcomes are also studied in the literature. However, findings raise the discussion about a possible overlap between the behavioral component of engagement and the loyalty concept, depending on the perceived scope of engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation that we have been living has a strong impact on tourism and hospitality sectors, especially because it has led to new characteristics of traveling and stays in the short term. Within the upscale hotel context, the role of the human element, together with the integration of technology are expected to continue after COVID-19 pandemic. However, findings suggest that the need to travel is expected to continue or to even grow in the future, although hotels need to have financial resilience to survive the crisis. Safety and security procedures implemented by these hotels, together with the vaccine and the trust on the brand, are believed to ensure guests´ confidence in upscale hotels. Finally, we can also conclude that the relevance of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity is expected to grow in the future.

This study, as any other research, has limitations. Firstly, it is expected that the opinions and perceptions of the interviewees are based on their professional experience which can, somehow, be influenced by the hospitality characteristics of the countries where they have worked, namely, Portugal. However, this is somehow overpassed because the majority of respondents have a vast experience and knowledge of the field, as well as an international perspective. Moreover, during the interviews, different examples of upscale hotels, in different geographies, have been given by the interviewees to explain their point of view. Secondly, although a sense of data saturation has been achieved, using a larger sample of interviewees

could be beneficial, especially if hospitality experts from other segments (eg. economy chains) are included, to contrast the opinions. Finally, it is important to recognize that these interviews occurred during an extraordinary time- COVID-19 pandemic- that has strongly impacted the sector under study, as well as customers´ lives in general. Therefore, the opinions and perceptions conveyed are also influenced by this situation.

Despite the limitations, this exploratory study leads to important insights about brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, in the upscale hotel setting. Future research could extend these findings. Some examples of avenues for future research are:

- To apply a quantitative methodology to understand, in a more conclusive way, how these constructs interplay with each other in an upscale hotel setting;

- To capture the customers´ view about the topics and how they interplay in an upscale hotel setting;

- To study the authenticity dimensions that emerge from the findings, but not from the literature, namely, the integration in the local environment and local culture;

- To deeply explore the dichotomy authenticity and link to the past (heritage);

- To deeply explore the scope of the behavioral dimension of engagement to understand if loyalty components (return/ repurchase, WOM, recommendations) should be considered under the scope of this behavioral component, transforming engagement in the ultimate goal, instead of loyalty;

- To analyze the role of the emotional dimension of engagement in other upscale and luxury services to understand if its dominance is transversal across different industries.

In the next chapter we will present Study four which main aim is to identify the interrelation between the identified variables (brand experience, brand authenticity perceptions, customer engagement and possible outcomes), based on the defined conceptual framework. Study four applies a quantitative approach and reflects customers´ point of view. Based on these two approaches and perspectives, we believe we will reach a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

6. Study Four- Customers´ perspectives

Study four- exposed in this chapter- captures the guests´ perspectives regarding the constructs under analysis, as well as their relationships. This chapter is structured as follows: introduction, overview of the extended literature and proposed model, methodology of the study, findings, discussion of the findings, and, finally, conclusions and implications.

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to understand the established relationships between brand experience, brand authenticity, customer engagement and respective outcomes, in an upscale hotel setting. The main objectives are: i) to analyze if brand experience is a driver of brand authenticity, ii) to analyze if brand experience is a driver of customer engagement, iii) to verify if customer engagement is enhanced by brand authenticity perceptions, iv) to understand if authentic pride is a consequence of brand authenticity, v) to understand if behavioral intentions (loyalty) is a consequence of brand authenticity, vi) to verify if customer engagement enhances authentic pride, and vii) to verify if customer engagement enhances behavioral intentions (loyalty). Thus, seven hypotheses are formulated, based on the proposed conceptual framework that has emerged from the literature review performed and from the identified knowledge gaps. Moreover, Study three, helped to fine tune the model. The insights coming from Study three seem to point out to the following directions: i) there is an apparent relationship among the constructs of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, ii) experience is the construct that "comes first", iii) and several outcomes of brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement can be identified, being the most relevant the behavioral outcomes (recommendation, positive WOM, return/ repurchase and guests becoming brand ambassadors). The findings are analyzed and discussed taking into consideration the consistency with the literature.

This study´s setting is the hotel industry. The mentioned relationships are analyzed in the hotel sector and, specifically, in the context of upscale hotels. The relevance of brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement in the service context, as well as the knowledge gaps identified in the literature and described in the next section (6.2), were the main reasons for choosing the hotel industry as the context to analyze these relationships. In fact, in today´s market scenario, hotels are much more than just places to sleep, as guests perceive them

as places to pursue experiences (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Sukhu et al., 2019). Specifically, we decided to analyze upscale hotels because, on the one hand, customers of higher priced hotels tend to be more engaged than those of lower priced hotel brands (Choi & Kandampully, 2019) and, on the other hand, authenticity is a main dimension of luxury goods and luxury offers, in general (Manthiou et al., 2018). Based on previous research, in this study, an upscale hotel is defined as a 4 or 5-star hotel which is characterized by a superior service and an excellent architecture, landscaping and interior design, providing gourmet dining, 24h room service, Internet access and other services (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Sun et al., 2016).

6.2 Overview of the extended literature and proposed model

6.2.1 Customer Experience

In light of increasing competition, it has become more difficult for firms and brands to differentiate from each other. Therefore, creating unique and memorable experiences has been a vehicle to ensure differentiation, especially in the service sector (Walls, 2013). Creating an impactful customer experience is, in fact, an important management objective (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The importance of the topic, together with the increasing complexity of customer experiences in modern times- resulting from customers interacting with firms through different touchpoints and channels, along the customer journey- have turned this construct into a very important research challenge in the marketing field, for the next years (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999) are among the first scholars who raised the attention to the relevance of customer experience. Pine and Guilmore (1998) introduced the concept of "Experience Economy", explaining that experiences are a new economic offering, differing from goods and services. It is perceived as a multidimensional concept that is characterized by four realms of an experience: educational, entertainment, esthetic and escapist (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). "Experiential Marketing" is a strategic framework that has been widely accepted by researchers. It assumes that consumers have a rational and an emotional component and seek pleasurable experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Schmitt (1999) considers that five dimensions represent customer experience: sensory (SENSE), affective (FEEL), cognitive (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT) and social or relational (RELATE).

Several definitions of customer experience can be found in the literature. However, in general, practitioners and scholars tend to agree that customer experience is a multidimensional

construct, encompassing different aspects (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience is defined as "…a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 71). Other authors define it as "the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company" (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p. 118). An experience can be related to a specific aspect of the offering, namely, the brand. In fact, brand experience is defined as "…subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53). In this study, we adopt the brand experience perspective presented by Brakus et al (2009).

In the tourism and hospitality industry, the importance of the topic has been recognized by scholars as experience is one of the core benefits of service offers, due to their particular characteristics (e.g., Loureiro et al., 2020; Manthiou et al., 2016; Prentice et al., 2019). However, it is stated that there is a gap between the conceptual notion of consumer experience and the lack of empirical evidence, especially in the hotel industry (Walls, 2013). Concerning the relationship between experience and other constructs, several studies have analyzed how customer experience and, in concrete, brand experience relate with other constructs, namely, customer engagement (e.g., Hepola et al., 2017; Huang & Chen, 2021; Martínez-López et al., 2017; Merrilees, 2016; Prentice et al., 2019). However, scholars call for more research stating that there is still a strong need to examine how these constructs interact with one another (Brodie et al., 2011; Hepola et al., 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

6.2.2 Brand Authenticity

The quest for authenticity has been growing importance in contemporary society and in consumers´ lives (Fine, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). In fact, the meaning of authenticity is reflected in consumer behavior, in the consumption setting. For postmodern consumers, "quality no longer differentiates, authenticity does" (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, p. 23). In the marketing field, consumers´ quest for authenticity is considered "one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 21). Despite the relevance of the concept, research on authenticity has been very fragmented which, in turn, leads to several definitions of the term in the literature (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). However,

some level of agreement can be found as the concept is many times associated with being genuine, real and/or true (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

When the concept is applied to objects like brands, the concept of brand authenticity emerges (Fritz et al., 2017). Different definitions of the concept can be found in the literature. For instance, Fritz et al. (2017) state that "in summary, brand authenticity can be defined as the perceived consistency of a brand's behavior that reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining its brand essence or substantive nature, whereby the perceptual process involves two types of authenticity (i.e. indexical and iconic authenticity)" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 327). Another perspective considers that "(1) Authenticity in the context of brands deals with the authenticity of market offerings (objects and services) in contrast to the authenticity of human beings; (2) Brand authenticity is based on the evaluations of individuals rather than being solely related to the inherent attributes of the brand (for references on this topic cf. Beverland and Farrelly 2010); (3) Brand authenticity corresponds to a variety of attributes since there is no unique definition of the authenticity concept, particularly in the branding context" (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 567). In this study, we adopt the scale of Akbar and Wymer (2017) who assume that brand authenticity is a two-dimensional concept and define it as "the extent to which a brand is considered unique, legitimate, truthful to its claims, and lacking falsity" (Akbar & Wymer, 2017, p. 14).

Scholars call for deeper research on authenticity/ brand authenticity in different segments or industries (e.g., Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Napoli et al., 2016; Spiggle et al., 2012) and, specifically, in the hospitality sector (e.g., Manthiou et al., 2018; Mody et al., 2019). Although authenticity has been playing an important role in tourism and hospitality, it is stated that "even though authenticity has not been ignored in the hospitality and tourism research, it is still understudied in the hotel sector" (Manthiou et al., 2018, p. 39).

Concerning the antecedents and outcomes of brand authenticity, Fritz et al. (2017) claim that despite the growing trend to study the relationship between brand authenticity and other constructs, there is still a research gap concerning this topic. Other scholars corroborate this perspective and suggest that deeper research about the relationship of brand authenticity and other related constructs is required (Morhart et al., 2015; Moulard et al., 2016). Therefore, this study aims to address the mentioned knowledge gaps. Indeed, the association between constructs needs to be further explored, for instance, the association between brand experience and brand authenticity (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020), as well as the outcomes of both experience and authenticity (Loureiro, 2020). Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020) states that although in the marketing literature the importance of the concepts of brand experience and brand

authenticity is widely recognized, the relationship between these two constructs and their outcomes has not been deeply explored, namely in the tourism setting. Khan and Fatma (2021) also recognize the need to study how online destination brand experience impacts destination brand authenticity. Out of the tourism setting, Safeer et al. (2020), underline the role of brand experience as an essential marketing tool as marketers try to provide everlasting experiences to consumers, in every touchpoint. The authors also recognize that many researchers are eager to understand consumer preferences towards authentic brands that boost their brand experience. From the literature review conducted, we realize that there is a high level of fragmentation concerning brand authenticity´s antecedents and that research analyzing the relationship between brand experience and brand authenticity has been scarce. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested (see Figure 6.1):

H1: Brand experience is positively associated with brand authenticity

6.2.3 Customer Engagement

The present marketing era has emphasized the need for companies to keep their customers engaged as "the goal of organizations evolved from relationship marketing to engaging customers in all possible ways" (Pansari & Kumar, 2017, p. 294). Customers can, indeed, create value for a firm in many different ways (Kumar et al., 2010). Pansari and Kumar (2017) define customer engagement as the mechanics that customers use to add value to the firm. Both practitioners and scholars recognize the importance of the concept. In the Academia, engagement has been studied in different academic disciplines and in the marketing literature the terms "customer engagement", "consumer engagement" and "brand engagement" have been studied, mainly after 2005 (Brodie et al., 2011). In fact, there has been an increasing number of authors studying customer engagement, in different industries and countries. Several definitions of customer engagement have been developed in the marketing field, over time, being considered a psychological process which drives customer loyalty (Bowden, 2009) and a "a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/ object (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships" (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 260). It is also considered "a behavioural manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions" (Verhoef et al., 2010, p. 247). A vast proportion of studies perceives the concept as a multidimensional construct with cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (e.g., Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011a; Itani et al., 2019). The development of internet and, consequently, of digital and social media highlighted the importance of customer engagement

in these new contexts (Bilro et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2013). In the hospitality and tourism context, So et al. (2014) develop a scale, based on a survey filled out by hotel and airline customers, that aggregates five factors (identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction). The identification dimension is defined as a cognitive component that, at the brand level, occurs when the consumer sees his or her self-image similar to the brand´s image, while the enthusiasm dimension is related to a positive affectivity of a customer´s engagement with a brand (So et al., 2014). The same authors define the attention dimension as the consumers´ attention and focus on the brand, the absorption dimension as the level of concentration and immersion of consumers while interacting with the firm, its products or, even, other customers and, finally, the interaction dimension is "the behavioral manifestation of a consumer´s relationship with the brand beyond traditional consumptive behavior" (So et al., 2014, p. 310). This scale is, in fact, the one applied in this study (Study four of the current thesis).

Although the engagement topic has been studied within the hospitality and tourism industry, scholars call for more empirical research concerning customer engagement and customer engagement behaviors in this specific setting (e.g., Romero, 2017; So et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2013). Moreover, despite the diversity of studies analyzing the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement, specific relationships need to be deeper explored. This is the case, for instance, of the relationship between experience and engagement in the tourism and hospitality context (Bilro et al., 2018; NasarAmini Jeloudarlou et al., 2021; Prentice & Nguyen, 2020). Thus, we propose that (see Figure 6.1):

H2: Brand experience is positively associated with customer engagement

Another situation regards the relationship between authenticity and customer engagement (Algharabat et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Rather et al., 2019; Zanon et al., 2019). For example, Algharabat et al. (2018) suggest that future research consider authenticity as an antecedent of consumer brand engagement and Rather et al. (2019) focus on place authenticity stating that although several constructs have been explored as antecedents of customer engagement, little is known about the role of place authenticity in driving customer engagement. In fact, although brand authenticity and customer engagement are two relevant concepts in marketing, studies addressing their relationship in the hotel sector are scarce. Thus, we propose that (see Figure 6.1):

H3: Brand authenticity is positively associated with customer engagement

6.2.4 Authentic Pride

Pride is an important emotion that has a critical role in different domains of psychological functioning (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Its regulation is "intrinsically linked to the regulation and maintenance of self-esteem" (Tracy & Robins, 2004, p. 194). Scholars argue that there are two facets of pride: authentic pride and hubristic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Authentic pride (*a person is proud of something that he/she did*) might be linked to internal, unstable and controllable causes. It is usually based on specific accomplishments and it is usually linked to feelings of self-worth (Tracy & Robins, 2007). It is achievement-oriented, resulting from a specified event (Williams & DeSteno, 2008). Hubristic pride, which is pride in the global self (*a person is proud of who he/she is*), might be linked to internal, stable, uncontrollable causes (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Hubristic pride is many times associated with dominance, while authentic pride is more related with prestige (Cheng et al., 2010). Moreover, Cheng et al (2010) add that dominance is positively associated with specific traits like aggression, disagreeableness and narcissism, while prestige is positively associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, achievement, advice-giving, prosociality and genuine self-esteem. In the case of this study, we will focus exclusively on authentic pride.

Past research concerning the relationship between authentic pride and brand authenticity and between authentic pride and customer engagement is scant. In fact, this study builds on the study of Loureiro (2019) that is one of the few studies analyzing the relationship between authenticity and authentic pride. The author analyses if visitors feel authentic pride when they perceive a museum´s exhibition as being authentic (Loureiro, 2019). Therefore, the scale used to measure authentic pride in this study is adapted from Loureiro (2019). Our objective is to understand if customers can feel authentic pride when they stay at a hotel that they perceive as being authentic. Moreover, we would also like to understand if the emotion of authentic pride increases when customers are more engaged with the hotel. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed (see Figure 6.1):

H4: Brand authenticity is positively associated with authentic pride

H6: Customer engagement is positively associated with authentic pride

6.2.5 Behavioral intentions (Loyalty)

The concept of customer loyalty is essential, not only for marketing scholars, but also for practitioners, as loyal customer show attachment and commitment towards the company, are not so attracted to competitors´ offers, are willing to pay more and express higher buying

intentions (Kandampully et al., 2015). Having loyal customers is, in fact, a very important goal for companies, in particular within the service sector (Brun et al., 2017).

Brand loyalty can be defined as "…the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes" (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973, p. 2). Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Another study operationalizes behavioral intentions of loyalty as the customers´ intention to say positive things about the brand, to recommend the brand to other consumers and friends, to consider the brand as a first choice and to purchase the brand in the near future (Zeithaml et al., 1996). In fact, behavioral intentions can be perceived as a proxy for loyalty (Loureiro, 2014).

In hospitality studies, three types of brand loyalty measures have been adopted: repeat visitation, intention to return and recommendation to others (Manthiou et al., 2016). In this study, we adapt the scale of Loureiro (2014) to measure behavioral intentions, as a proxy for loyalty. In the present study, behavioral intentions indicate the likelihood to return to the hotel, to recommend the hotel and to say positive things about the hotel. Loyalty has, indeed, been widely studied as a direct or indirect outcome of different constructs, in the business and marketing literature. For instance, it has been widely analyzed as an outcome of customer experience/ brand experience (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Brun et al., 2017), as an outcome of customer engagement (e.g., Dwivedi, 2015; Fehrer et al., 2018; Hapsari et al., 2017; Hollebeek, 2011a; So et al., 2014; Thakur, 2016), or as an outcome of authenticity (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2015; Mody et al., 2019; Mody & Hanks, 2019). However, scholars call for more empirical research on the relationship between loyalty and other constructs, namely, engagement (e.g. Fernandes & Esteves, 2016). The importance of the concept, together with the call for more research on the relationship between loyalty and other constructs, lead us the proposed hypotheses (see Figure 6.1):

H5: Brand authenticity is positively associated with behavioral intentions (loyalty)

H7: Customer engagement is positively associated with behavioral intentions (loyalty)

The proposed model includes two control variables: gender and age. These variables are controlled to understand if they have influence in the proposed relationships. Gender and age

were chosen as they have been analyzed as control variables in previous studies that address the relationships among customer experience, engagement and other constructs (e.g., Zhang et al., 2017). Moreover, these variables have also been analyzed as moderators in previous studies that address customer engagement (e.g., Cambra-Fierro & Melero-Polo, 2017; Islam et al., 2018).

6.2.6 Proposed model

Figure 6.1- Proposed model for Study four
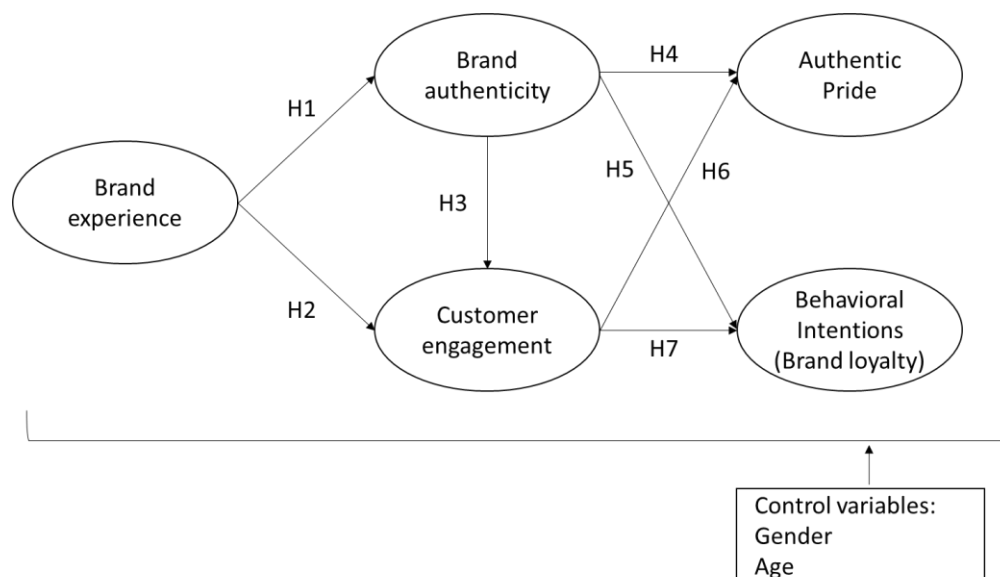
Source: Author´s elaboration

6.3 Methodology

6.3.1 Sample and data collection

To empirically test the proposed model, an online survey was developed, using the Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2020). Data were collected online from February 2020 to September 2020. Data were collected from respondents, recruited using convenience sampling, as performed in previous studies (e.g. Fernandes & Esteves, 2016). The survey was prepared in Portuguese and English, using the translation and back translation process (Sekaran, 1983). From 313 completed surveys collected (267 from the Portuguese version questionnaire and 46 from the English version questionnaire), 310 were considered valid as they revealed consistency. From these, 207 questionnaires corresponded to customers who had effectively stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months. In fact, only the individuals who agreed to participate in the

survey and had stayed in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months, could fill out the whole questionnaire. In this study, an upscale hotel is defined as a 4 or 5-star hotel which is characterized by a superior service and an excellent architecture, landscaping and interior design, providing gourmet dining, 24h room service, Internet access and other services (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Sun et al., 2016). Therefore, 207 questionnaires were used to validate the model.

We pre-tested both versions of the survey (Portuguese and English version) with 10 participants and introduced the necessary adjustments to the final questionnaire, based on the participants´ feedback. The survey has different sections. Annex B displays the set of questions from which the analyses performed in this study emerge.

The first section includes filter questions, asking participants if they had stayed in an upscale hotel in the last 12 months and also asking them to identify the name of the upscale hotel where they had stayed most recently. Only the respondents who had stayed in this type of hotel could proceed to the next questions. The other sections are related to the hotel identified by the respondents (the upscale hotel where participants had stayed most recently). The second, third and fourth sections are related to the customers´ experience in the hotel, the customers´ engagement with that hotel and their perceptions of the hotel authenticity. The fifth and sixth sections address questions related to what customers felt while staying at the hotel (authentic pride) and what they planned to do after staying at the hotel (behavioral intentions). Demographic information is collected in the last section of the survey.

6.3.2 Variables and measurement

Concerning the measurement scales used, our aim was to select scales that have already been applied to the tourism and/ or hospitality context. Thus, to measure brand experience, we adapted the scale of Brakus et al. (2009). This scale was originally developed taking into account brands from different industries. However, it has also been applied to the hotel context (e.g., Manthiou et al., 2016). Secondly, to measure customer engagement we adapted the scale of So et al. (2014) that is applied to the hotel and airlines context. Brand authenticity is measured based on the scale of Akbar and Wymer (2017). This scale has already been applied to the hotel context, for example, by Mody and Hanks (2019). The scales measuring authentic pride and behavioral intentions (used as a proxy for loyalty) were adapted from Loureiro (2019) and Loureiro (2014), respectively. In these studies, authentic pride is analyzed within the museums

context and behavioral intentions are measured in the rural tourism context. Seven-point Likert scales and a seven-point semantic scale were used as measurement scales.

6.3.3 Data analysis

Regarding data treatment, the partial least square approach (PLS) is used to analyze the proposed hypotheses. We use PLS structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) because it is recommended when "the goal is predicting key target constructs or identifying "driver" constructs", when "formatively measured constructs are part of the structural model" and when "the structural model is complex" (Hair Jr. et al., 2017, p. 23). This is, in fact, the case of the current proposed model. Compared to covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM can be widely applied to a variety of research situations as it works efficiently with small sample sizes and can also be used when data are nonnormally distributed (Hair Jr. et al., 2017; Risitano et al., 2017). SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) is the program used in this study.

6.4 Findings

Table 6.1 shows the respondents´ profile. The majority of respondents are female (57.0% of the sample) and most of them are between 30 and 49 years old (76.8%). Most of the respondents hold a Bachelor degree (35.7%) or a Master/ MBA degree (33.8%) and the vast majority is a full-time employee (71.0%).

Table 6.1- Respondents´ profile

Sociodemographic indicators	Percentage
Gender	
Female	57.0%
Male	43.0%
Age	
<30 y.o	1.9%
30-39 y.o	41.1%
40-49 y.o	35.7%
50-59 y.o	11.1%
>59 y.o	10.1%
Academic qualification	
Less than High School	0%

Sociodemographic indicators	Percentage
Completed High School	2.9%
Bachelor´s degree	35.7%
Master´s/ MBA degree	33.8%
Post-graduate studies	15.9%
PhD	9.2%
Other	2.4%
Employment status	
Full-time employee	71.0%
Part-time employee	5.8%
Entrepreneur/Businessperson	13.5%
Pensioner	4.3%
Student	2.9%
Unemployed	1.4%
Other	0.5%
ND	0.5%

Note: ND stands for Not Disclosed

Source: Author´s elaboration

The proposed model of this study has a large number of manifest variables and three second-order formative constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity). Therefore, for this study, PLS is an appropriate approach for data treatment (Chin et al., 2003). As suggested by Hair Jr. et al. (2017), the repeated indicators approach, combined with the use of latent variable scores in a two-stage HCM (hierarchical component model) analysis was applied to test the model with second order formative factors.

A PLS model should be analyzed taking into account two stages: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model describes the relationships between the constructs and the indicator variables and the structural model describes the relationships between the constructs (Hair Jr. et al., 2017).

The measurement model is assessed by evaluating the reliability of the individual measures, the convergent validity and the discriminant validity of the constructs. To evaluate the adequacy of the measures at the first-order construct level, item reliability is assessed by examining the loadings of the measures on their corresponding construct. Item loadings of scales measuring reflective constructs should be, at least, 0.7, meaning that the latent variable explains, at least, 50% of the indicator´s variance (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). In this study, two items were eliminated

because the loadings were <0.7. This was the case of the item "While staying at the hotel, I felt productive", measuring the construct Authentic Pride and of the item "This hotel is...Pretentious-Unpretentious", measuring the dimension genuineness of Brand Authenticity. The item loading of each item included in the analysis exceeds 0.7 (see Table 6.2).

All Cronbach's alpha values and all composite reliability values are above the threshold value of 0.7 (see Table 6.2). Therefore, the constructs are reliable. The measures demonstrate convergent validity because the average variance extracted (AVE) is above 0.5, which indicates that a substantial part of each indicator's variance (at least 50%) is explained by its own construct (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2- Measurement results

Latent variables and items	Mean (SD) items	Item loadings (reflective measure)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Brand Experience: Sensory dimension			0.939	0.961	0.891
This hotel makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses	6.000 (1.171)	0.928			
I find this hotel interesting in a sensory way	5.860 (1.202)	0.953			
This hotel appeals to my senses	5.749 (1.306)	0.950			
Brand Experience: Affective dimension			0.874	0.923	0.799
This hotel induces feelings and sentiments	5.787 (1.201)	0.898			
I have strong emotions for this hotel	5.217 (1.450)	0.909			
This hotel is an emotional hotel	4.971 (1.494)	0.874			
Brand Experience: Behavioral dimension			0.846	0.907	0.765
Staying in this hotel stimulates me to engage in physical actions/ activities	5.275 (1.525)	0.885			
This hotel results in bodily experiences	5.246 (1.622)	0.889			
This hotel is action oriented	4.512 (1.650)	0.848			
Brand Experience: Intellectual dimension			0.876	0.924	0.802
Staying in this hotel, engages me in a lot of thinking	4.696 (1.438)	0.889			

Latent variables and items	Mean (SD) items	Item loadings (reflective measure)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
This hotel makes me think	4.729 (1.374)	0.927			
This hotel stimulates my curiosity and problem solving	4.353 (1.490)	0.870			
Customer Engagement: Identification dimension			0.877	0.916	0.731
When someone criticizes this hotel, it feels like a personal insult	2.396 (1.641)	0.857			
When I talk about this hotel, I usually say we rather than they	1.923 (1.412)	0.834			
This hotel's successes are my successes	1.884 (1.368)	0.871			
When someone praises this hotel, it feels like a personal compliment	2.271 (1.631)	0.857			
Customer Engagement: Enthusiasm dimension			0.913	0.935	0.744
I am heavily into this hotel	2.739 (1.761)	0.772			
I am passionate about this hotel	3.454 (2.059)	0.895			
I am enthusiastic about this hotel	4.275 (1.910)	0.894			
I feel excited about this hotel.	4.324 (1.782)	0.890			
I love this hotel	4.860 (1.669)	0.856			
Customer Engagement: Attention dimension			0.947	0.959	0.826
I like to learn more about this hotel	4.304 (1.716)	0.849			
I pay a lot of attention to anything about this hotel	3.473 (1.741)	0.927			
Anything related to this hotel grabs my attention	3.580 (1.700)	0.923			
I concentrate a lot on this hotel	3.430 (1.787)	0.923			
I like learning more about this hotel	3.580 (1.797)	0.920			
Customer Engagement: Absorption dimension			0.915	0.934	0.705
When I stayed at this hotel, I forgot everything else around me.	3.841 (1.970)	0.838			
Time flew by when I stayed at this hotel	4.850 (1.863)	0.853			
When I stayed at this hotel, I got carried away	4.343 (1.863)	0.882			

Latent variables and items	Mean (SD) items	Item loadings (reflective measure)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
When I stayed in this hotel, it was difficult to detach myself from it.	3.604 (1.898)	0.859			
During my stay at this hotel, I was immersed	4.048 (1.833)	0.889			
When I stayed at this hotel, I felt happy	5.758 (1.255)	0.703			
Customer Engagement: Interaction dimension			0.943	0.957	0.818
In general, I like to get involved in the hotel brand community discussions	3.014 (1.749)	0.864			
I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the brand community of this hotel	2.913 (1.737)	0.939			
I am someone who likes actively participating in the hotel brand community discussions	2.720 (1.674)	0.951			
In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people in the brand community of this hotel	2.802 (1.715)	0.954			
I often participate in activities of the brand community of this hotel	2.092 (1.467)	0.803			
Brand Authenticity: Originality dimension			0.862	0.916	0.784
This hotel is…A Follower >> A Pioneer[a]	4.618 (1.534)	0.841			
This hotel is…Ordinary >> Innovative[a]	4.802 (1.489)	0.909			
This hotel is…Copied >> Unique[a]	4.942 (1.635)	0.903			
Brand Authenticity: Genuineness dimension			0.965	0.973	0.877
This hotel is…Insincere >> Sincere[a]	5.309 (1.555)	0.916			
This hotel is…Fake >> Real[a]	5.444 (1.525)	0.939			
This hotel is…Dishonest >> Honest[a]	5.512 (1.497)	0.961			
This hotel is…Disguised >> Undisguised[a]	5.367 (1.539)	0.955			
This hotel is…Illegitimate >> Legitimate[a]	5.638 (1.497)	0.909			
Authentic Pride			0.928	0.944	0.736

Latent variables and items	Mean (SD) items	Item loadings (reflective measure)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
During the stay, I felt accomplished	4.971 (1.516)	0.835			
While staying at the hotel, I felt successful	4.667 (1.491)	0.878			
While staying at the hotel, I felt that I achieved my goal	5.174 (1.630)	0.844			
While staying at the hotel, I felt fulfilled	5.072 (1.548)	0.881			
While staying at the hotel, I felt useful and worthy	4.686 (1.552)	0.857			
While staying at the hotel, I felt confident	5.092 (1.389)	0.852			
Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)			0.949	0.963	0.867
I will speak well about this hotel to other people	5.947 (1.275)	0.947			
I will recommend this hotel if someone asks for my advice	6.029 (1.274)	0.956			
I will encourage my friends and relatives to stay in this hotel	5.628 (1.442)	0.934			
In future vacations/ business trips I intend to return to this hotel	5.556 (1.577)	0.885			

Note: (SD)- Standard Deviation   [a]*Semantic scale*

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Regarding discriminant validity, according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, "the square root of each construct´s AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct" (Hair Jr. et al., 2017, p. 116). Table 6.3 shows that this criterion is met. The cross-loadings are also an approach to assess the discriminant validity. In this study, the indicators´ outer loadings on the associated constructs are higher than any of their cross-loadings on other constructs (see Annex F). This suggests that discriminant validity is established. The discriminant validity was further checked using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). The values are below the threshold of 0.90. This also suggests that discriminant validity is achieved (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.3- Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Absorption	**0.839**												
2. Affective	0.605	**0.894**											
3. Attention	0.621	0.533	**0.909**										
4. Authentic Pride	0.572	0.483	0.452	**0.858**									
5. Behavioral	0.306	0.332	0.194	0.254	**0.875**								
6. Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.525	0.545	0.510	0.496	0.302	**0.931**							
7. Enthusiasm	0.700	0.668	0.712	0.500	0.326	0.650	**0.863**						
8. Genuineness	0.206	0.178	0.184	0.250	0.136	0.358	0.284	**0.936**					
9. Identification	0.375	0.320	0.427	0.301	0.120	0.286	0.490	0.131	**0.855**				
10. Intellectual	0.564	0.748	0.556	0.398	0.379	0.479	0.578	0.158	0.391	**0.896**			
11. Interaction	0.422	0.248	0.565	0.314	0.151	0.272	0.453	0.074	0.406	0.320	**0.904**		
12. Originality	0.421	0.546	0.476	0.411	0.266	0.518	0.502	0.623	0.249	0.429	0.189	**0.885**	
13. Sensory	0.412	0.739	0.390	0.341	0.251	0.451	0.508	0.108	0.179	0.583	0.142	0.413	**0.944**

Note: Values on the diagonal (in bold) represent the square root of AVE. Lower diagonal values indicate factor correlations.

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Table 6.4- Discriminant validity: Heterotrait- Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Absorption													
2. Affective	0.678												
3. Attention	0.664	0.586											
4. Authentic Pride	0.620	0.534	0.481										
5. Behavioral	0.348	0.383	0.215	0.283									
6. Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.568	0.596	0.538	0.520	0.338								
7. Enthusiasm	0.767	0.746	0.766	0.538	0.367	0.697							
8. Genuineness	0.222	0.193	0.193	0.261	0.148	0.374	0.303						
9. Identification	0.414	0.365	0.467	0.335	0.138	0.312	0.550	0.142					
10. Intellectual	0.630	0.853	0.612	0.441	0.439	0.525	0.647	0.173	0.446				
11. Interaction	0.449	0.272	0.593	0.333	0.167	0.284	0.487	0.079	0.449	0.351			
12. Originality	0.473	0.630	0.531	0.459	0.303	0.571	0.567	0.669	0.287	0.494	0.207		
13. Sensory	0.447	0.815	0.414	0.363	0.281	0.477	0.547	0.114	0.198	0.641	0.150	0.461	

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement are measured as second-order formative constructs. Brand experience comprises the Sensory, Affective, Behavioral and Intellectual dimensions, while brand authenticity encompasses the dimensions of Genuineness and Originality. Identification, Enthusiasm, Attention, Absorption and Interaction are the dimensions of the construct customer engagement. At the second-order construct level, we analyze indicator weights, significance of weight (t-student) and multicollinearity of indicators. To access weights, t-values and p-values, a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5000 re-samples was employed. Table 6.5 shows that all the indicators have a positive beta weight and a significance level of at least 0.001. This suggests that the indicators are relevant to the construction of the formative construct. The degree of multicollinearity among the formative indicators is assessed by analyzing the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF shows how much an indicator's variance is explained by the remaining indicators associated with the same construct (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). A common acceptable threshold for VIF is below 5 (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). In this study, the VIF values of the formative indicators are below 5, therefore, the results do not seem to present a multicollinearity problem (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5- Measurement model: second-order formative constructs and multicollinearity assessment

Second-order formative constructs	First-order constructs/ dimensions	Weights	t-value	VIF
Brand Experience	Sensory	0.332***	22.159	2.215
	Affective	0.359***	25.674	3.335
	Behavioral	0.182***	7.020	1.175
	Intellectual	0.341***	26.169	2.385
Customer Engagement	Identification	0.134***	10.078	1.397
	Enthusiasm	0.291***	23.685	3.244
	Attention	0.295***	26.727	2.535
	Absorption	0.311***	19.605	2.229
	Interaction	0.208***	12.077	1.591
Brand Authenticity	Originality	0.408***	19.453	2.309
	Genuineness	0.693***	33.115	1.720

Note: *** p<0.001

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Concerning structural results, as previously stated, a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5000 re-samples was employed to analyze the precision of the PLS estimates

and the hypotheses of the proposed model (see Table 6.6). All path coefficients are significant at the 0.001, 0.01 or 0.05 levels, supporting all the hypotheses. The findings show that brand experience has a positive and significant direct effect on brand authenticity (β=0.340, p<0.001) and on customer engagement (β=0.589, p<0.001). However, the relationship between brand experience and customer engagement seems to be stronger than the relationship brand experience and brand authenticity perceptions. Brand authenticity has a positive and significant influence on customer engagement (β=0.164, p<0.01). Moreover, brand authenticity has a positive and significant impact on authentic pride (β=0.157, p<0.05) and on behavioral intentions (loyalty) (β=0.279, p<0.001). Customer engagement has a positive and significant direct effect on both authentic pride (β=0.508, p<0.001) and on behavioral intentions (loyalty) (β=0.500, p<0.001). In fact, the strength of the relationship customer engagement→ authentic pride and customer engagement→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) is higher than the relationships brand authenticity→ authentic pride and brand authenticity→ behavioral intentions (loyalty).

Table 6.6- Structural results: direct effects

Path	Path Coefficient	t-value	f^2	Test results
Direct effects				
H1. Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity	0.340***	5.474	0.131	H1: Supported
H2. Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement	0.589***	13.811	0.549	H2: Supported
H3. Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement	0.164**	2.965	0.042	H3: Supported
H4. Brand Authenticity -> Authentic Pride	0.157*	2.401	0.033	H4: Supported
H5. Brand Authenticity -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.279***	4.412	0.118	H5: Supported
H6. Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	0.508***	8.942	0.340	H6: Supported
H7. Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.500***	9.716	0.381	H7: Supported

*Note: * p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001*
Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Although the indirect effects have not been addressed in the proposed hypotheses, we have analyzed specific indirect effects to identify possible mediator variables. Table 6.7 shows that the specific indirect effects are significant at the 0.001, 0.01 or 0.05 levels, indicating possible mediation effects. However, there are relationships that seem stronger than others. The relationships brand experience→ customer engagement→ authentic pride (β=0.300, p<0.001)

and brand experience→ customer engagement→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) (β=0.295, p<0.001) seem stronger than the relationships brand experience→ brand authenticity→ authentic pride (β=0.053, p<0.05) and brand experience→ brand authenticity→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) (β=0.095, p<0.01). These results indicate that customer engagement may be a stronger mediator between brand experience and the outcomes authentic pride and behavioral intentions (loyalty), compared to the mediator brand authenticity. As suggested by Hair Jr. et al. (2017), we used bootstrapping to test mediating effects as this the best approach for evaluating mediation analysis. In fact, this approach makes no assumptions concerning the sampling distribution of the statistics and no assumptions concerning the shape of the variables´ distribution. Moreover, it can be applied with more confidence to small sample sizes. In addition to the bootstrapping approach, the Sobel test (MacKinnon et al., 1995; Sobel, 1982) was also applied. The results of the Sobel Test also indicate that there are mediation effects (see Table 6.8).

Table 6.7- Structural results: specific indirect effects

Path	Path Coefficient	t-value
Specific indirect effects		
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement	0.056*	2.592
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Authentic Pride	0.053*	2.139
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.095**	2.925
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	0.300***	6.615
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.295***	6.932
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	0.083**	3.029
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.082**	3.034

*Note: * p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001*

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Table 6.8- Sobel Test

Path	Test statistic (z-test)
Specific indirect effects	
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement	2.620**
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Authentic Pride	2.182*
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	3.445**
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	7.470***
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	7.972***
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	2.828**
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	2.853**

*Note: * p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001*

Source: Author´s elaboration

The Q^2 statistic (i.e., the Stone–Geisser´s Q^2 value) can be used to evaluate the predictive relevance of the model. Q^2 values are obtained by using the blindfolding procedure. In this study, all Q^2 values are positive. This means that the relationships in the model have predictive relevance (see Table 6.9). The model also demonstrates predictive power (R^2). In fact, the modelled constructs explain 11.5% of the variance in brand authenticity perceptions, 44.0% of the variance in customer engagement, 34.1% of the variance in authentic pride and 42.9% of the variance in behavioral intentions (loyalty) (see Table 6.9). "In addition to evaluating the R^2 values of all endogenous constructs, the change in R^2 value when a specific exogenous construct is omitted from the model can be used to evaluate whether the omitted construct has a substantive impact on the endogenous constructs"(Hair Jr. et al., 2017, p. 201). This measure is the f^2 effect size. In this study, the effect size of brand experience on customer engagement and the effect size of customer engagement on authentic pride and on behavioral intentions (loyalty) are large effects (see Table 6.6).

Table 6.9- Coefficient of Determination (R^2 value) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Constructs	R^2	Q^2
Brand Authenticity	0.115	0.111
Customer Engagement	0.440	0.430
Authentic Pride	0.341	0.328
Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.429	0.413

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Finally, we employed the multigroup analysis (MGA) to understand if there were differences among the groups in the research model, concerning the control variables. We ran the MGA process for each of the control variables (gender and age). For gender, two groups have been displayed (male and female). For age, taking into account the median value, two groups ($<= 40$ y.o and > 40 y.o) have also been analyzed. Age presents no significant difference between groups, while gender presents some differences (see Table 6.10 and Table 6.11). Specifically, the relationship brand authenticity$\rightarrow$ behavioral intentions (loyalty) seems to be stronger for men than for women and the relationship customer engagement$\rightarrow$ behavioral intentions (loyalty) seems to be stronger for women than for men.

Table 6.10- Results of multigroup analysis- gender

Path	Male (n=89)		Female (n=118)		Difference (Male-Female)
	PC	t-value	PC	t-value	PC
Brand Authenticity -> Authentic Pride	0.192*	2.100	0.147 [ns]	1.591	0.045 [ns]
Brand Authenticity -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.531***	6.450	0.102 [ns]	1.558	0.429***
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement	0.138[ns]	1.707	0.190*	2.507	-0.052 [ns]
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity	0.416***	4.667	0.296***	3.580	0.120 [ns]
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement	0.520***	6.821	0.632***	11.762	-0.112 [ns]
Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	0.537***	6.775	0.472***	5.684	0.065 [ns]
Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.338***	4.462	0.615***	10.598	-0.278**

*Note: PC: Path Coefficient * p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001 ns Not Significant*

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

Table 6.11- Results of multigroup analysis- age

Path	<= 40 y.o (n=105)		>40 y.o (n=102)		Difference (<= 40 y.o- > 40 y.o)
	PC	t-value	PC	t-value	PC
Brand Authenticity -> Authentic Pride	0.126 [ns]	1.245	0.196*	2.482	-0.070 [ns]
Brand Authenticity -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.376***	4.017	0.182*	2.198	0.194 [ns]
Brand Authenticity -> Customer Engagement	0.142 [ns]	1.647	0.191**	2.598	-0.049 [ns]
Brand Experience -> Brand Authenticity	0.366***	4.312	0.319***	3.512	0.047 [ns]
Brand Experience -> Customer Engagement	0.612***	9.800	0.551***	8.263	0.061 [ns]
Customer Engagement -> Authentic Pride	0.553***	7.472	0.457***	4.963	0.096 [ns]
Customer Engagement -> Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	0.460***	5.728	0.541***	7.599	-0.080 [ns]

Note: PC: Path Coefficient * p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001 ns Not Significant

Source: Author´s elaboration based on PLS output

6.5 Discussion of the findings

The findings of the current study deserve further discussion, taking into account previous studies. Firstly, the results reveal that a positive brand experience in an upscale hotel can drive the perceptions of authenticity about the hotel brand. Based on the literature review performed, we conclude that there is a high level of fragmentation concerning brand authenticity´s antecedents and that research analyzing the relationship between brand experience and brand authenticity has been scarce. Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2020) states that although in the marketing literature the importance of the concepts of brand experience and brand authenticity is widely recognized, "models that jointly analyze these two constructs and their repercussions on tourists' behavioral intentions toward the destination are practically non-existent" (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020, p. 2). Therefore, in their study, the authors address the mentioned research gap and conclude that online destination brand experience directly impacts destination brand authenticity. Another study, addressing the same gap, reinforces the conclusion that online destination brand experience is a driver of destination brand authenticity (Khan & Fatma, 2021). Out of the tourism context, the relationship between brand experience and brand authenticity

in the manufacturing, retail and services context is also analyzed (e.g., Safeer et al., 2020) and the authors conclude that brand experience influences brand authenticity.

Secondly, in this study, brand experience has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, indicating that a positive experience enhances the engagement with the hotel. These findings are in line with previous research. In fact, previous studies have been prolific in studying the relationship between experience and customer engagement in different contexts like, for instance, retail, social media, online brand communities, tableware or the airline industry, and the authors state that experience is a driver of customer engagement (e.g. Hepola et al., 2017; Martínez-López et al., 2017; Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017; Prentice et al., 2019; Tafesse, 2016). The influence of customer and service experience on engagement has also been studied in the hotel context and these studies´ findings also reveal that experience is a driver of customer engagement (e.g., NasarAmini Jeloudarlou et al., 2021; Prentice & Nguyen, 2020). The recognition that brand experience is an antecedent of brand authenticity and customer engagement has also emerged from Study three as managers recognize that, among the analyzed constructs, brand experience is what "comes first".

Thirdly, in this study, findings also reveal that brand authenticity is positively associated with customer engagement, indicating that when upscale hotels are perceived as more authentic, the engagement with the hotel tends to increase. Although brand authenticity and customer engagement are two relevant concepts in marketing, the study of their relationship has been limited and very scarce in the hotel sector. In the context of family firms, the indirect effect of brand authenticity in social media engagement is analyzed (Zanon et al., 2019). In fact, the authors state that when a company is perceived as more authentic, consumers are able to develop a deeper relationship with that firm. Moreover, in the tourism context, the concept of place authenticity and destination brand authenticity have been explored, as well as their relationship with customer engagement (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Rather et al., 2019) and authors conclude that when tourism destinations are perceived as more authentic, the engagement associated with the site is expected to increase.

Fourthly, findings indicate that brand authenticity has a positive impact on authentic pride and on behavioral intentions (loyalty). Concerning the relationship between brand authenticity and authentic pride, previous research is very scant. Loureiro (2019) analyzes the relationship between perceived authenticity and authentic pride and concludes that, in the museums´ context, visitors have a feeling of self-worth when they perceive that the museum is authentic. On the contrary, the direct and indirect relationship between brand authenticity and behavioral intentions (loyalty) has been widely explored in the literature, in different contexts (eg. fashion,

hotels) and shows that a when customers perceive a brand as being authentic, brand loyalty tends to increase (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Mody & Hanks, 2019). Therefore, this study´s findings are in line with previous research.

Fifthly, in this study, customer engagement is positively associated with authentic pride and behavioral intentions (loyalty), meaning that an engaged customer would have a greater feeling of self-worth and would be more loyal. On the one hand, the relationship between customer engagement an loyalty has been frequently established in a diversity of contexts, like mobile phones, airlines, hotels, insurance services or retail (e.g., Dwivedi, 2015; Fehrer et al., 2018; Hapsari et al., 2017; So et al., 2014; Thakur, 2016). On the other hand, previous research exploring the relationship between engagement and authentic pride is practically non-existent.

Insights emerging from Study three are in line with these conclusions as managers identify behavioral outcomes (recommendation, positive WOM, return/ repurchase and guests becoming brand ambassadors) as the most important consequences of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity.

Sixthly, as previously stated, the strength of the relationship customer engagement→ authentic pride and customer engagement→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) is higher than the relationships brand authenticity→ authentic pride and brand authenticity→ behavioral intentions (loyalty). This indicates that customer engagement is a superior predictor of authentic pride and behavioral intentions (loyalty). This might be explained by the fact that engagement is a relational construct, reflecting the bond between the customer and the brand which, in this case, is the hotel. When this bond is strong and encompasses different components, as in the case of the customer engagement construct, it is expected that a consumer would like to sustain this relationship in the future (Dwivedi, 2015). Therefore, brand loyalty seems "a natural step" for consumers who have this relationship with the brand. This bond/ relationship characteristic that does not emerge directly from the brand authenticity construct, seems to be a key element to drive other constructs, namely, behavioral intentions (loyalty).

Seventhly, taking into account the indirect effects, the role of customer engagement and brand authenticity as mediating variables is proven, that is the relationship between brand experience and authentic pride and brand experience and behavioral intentions (loyalty) can be mediated by customer engagement and also by brand authenticity. However, the strength of the relationships seems to indicate that customer engagement is a stronger mediator, in the above mentioned relationships, than brand authenticity. As previously stated, very few studies have analyzed the relationships between authentic pride and other constructs. On the contrary, behavioral intentions (loyalty), as a consequence of other constructs, has been widely explored

in the literature. In fact, in previous research, the relationship between brand experience, customer engagement and brand loyalty has been studied and the role of customer engagement as a mediator between the other two constructs has been established, for instance, in the restaurant sector (e.g. Huang & Chen, 2021). In the same vein, this relationship has been analyzed in the context of integrated resorts and the authors conclude that providing a unique and memorable experience will influence engagement and, consequently, behavioral intentions (Ahn & Back, 2018). Although the research concerning the mediating role of brand authenticity between brand experience and behavioral intentions (loyalty) has been limited, in the tourism setting, it is stated that destination brand authenticity is a consequence of tourists´ online experience when they visited online platforms promoting a destination and also a driver of behavioral intentions towards the destination (intention to visit and recommend) (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020).

Eighthly, other relationships, namely, the relationship between brand authenticity, customer engagement and brand loyalty has also proven to be significant, in this study. In the tourism context, Rather et al. (2019) have concluded that tourism customer engagement mediates the relationship between place authenticity and loyalty.

Ninthly, all the dimensions of brand experience are found to be significant in the formation of brand experience itself. Affective ($\beta=0.359$), sensory ($\beta=0.332$) and intellectual ($\beta=0.341$) dimensions emerge as the most relevant, confirming the insights coming from Study three. In fact, in Study three, most of the interviewees recognized the sensorial and emotional dimensions of experience as the most important, in an upscale hotel context. Taking into account previous research, affective experience emerges as the main driver of customer engagement, in a restaurant context (Huang & Chen, 2021). Taking into account the dimensions of customer engagement, we conclude that all of them are significant. Yet, absorption ($\beta=0.311$), attention ($\beta=0.295$) and enthusiasm ($\beta=0.291$) emerge as the most relevant in shaping the overall engagement concept. Insights from Study three reveal that managers consider the emotional characteristics of engagement as the most important for an upscale hotel. This dimension is directly related with the enthusiasm dimension analyzed in the current study. For Huang and Chen (2021), the emotional dimension of engagement is the main driver of brand loyalty, followed by cognitive engagement. Finally, regarding the brand authenticity second-order factor, we realize that genuineness ($\beta=0.693$) and originality ($\beta=0.408$) are important dimensions of the construct. The relevance of these dimensions has also been acknowledged by the interviewees in Study three. However, in this study, genuineness comes out as the most important dimension. This result is, indeed, in line with previous research that identifies the

dimension of genuineness as the most important attribute of an authentic hotel brand (Mody et al., 2019).

Finally, concerning control variables, age does not display any difference between groups. However, for gender, the relationship brand authenticity→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) seems to be stronger for men than for women, and the relationship customer engagement→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) seems to be stronger for women than for men. A possible explanation for this difference could be that women tend to be more impacted by the behavior of frontline employees (Rasool et al., 2021) which, in this case, are the hotel employees. In fact, the human element is considered a key factor of engagement, not only by the interviewees, in Study three, but also in the literature (e.g. Kumar & Pansari, 2016). According to Rasool et al. (2021), men and women present different decision-making styles and women tend to develop more relationship and social oriented personalities. Rasool et al. (2021) also conclude that gender has a moderating effect between customer engagement and customer loyalty. Concerning the relationship between brand authenticity and behavioral intentions (loyalty) appearing stronger for men than for women, a possible explanation could be drawn, based on the study of Moulard et al. (2014). In that study, Mourlard et al. (2014) explore the role of gender in understanding the consumers´ response to art and to artist authenticity. According to the authors, research on selectivity theory indicates that the way in which information is processed differ from men to women, as women are more comprehensive processors, while men are more selective processors, tending to a "schema-based, heuristic processing style" (Moulard et al., 2014, p. 587). In fact, the authors conclude that artist authenticity affects attitude towards the artist (perceived as a human brand) which, in turn, influences consumers' evaluation of the artist's work and their behavioral intentions. They also conclude that attitude towards the artist has a stronger effect on behavioral intentions for males than for females, as men are more likely than women to use brands as heuristics in consumers´ judgment and decision making.

6.6 Conclusions and implications

This study examines a comprehensive model of how brand experience may influence brand authenticity and customer engagement which, in turn, impact authentic pride and behavioral intentions (loyalty). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that this model is studied and empirically tested, in an upscale hotel context. The proposed hypotheses were supported indicating that a positive experience with the hotel brand influences the customers´ perception

of authenticity about the hotel, and also their engagement with the hotel. Moreover, the more authentic the hotel is perceived, the more engaged the customers tend to be with the hotel. Another important conclusion is that a customer who perceives an upscale hotel as being genuine and original, tends to recommend the hotel, return and spread a positive WOM. Furthermore, he/she also tends to have a greater feeling of self-worth. Finally, an engaged customer is also more likely to be loyal to the hotel and feel an authentic pride while staying at the hotel.

In summary, this study´s results contribute to a deeper understanding of how the brand authenticity and customer engagement constructs are perceived and applied, in the hotel context. This study also sheds light on the importance of the constructs´ different dimensions, in the referred setting. Moreover, the consequences of brand experience and the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity and customer engagement are also explored. Finally, concerning the relationships among constructs, on the one hand, this study´s findings reinforce the results of previous studies, empirically testing established relationships, in the upscale hotel context. On the other hand, relationships that haven´t been deeply explored in previous research are addressed in this study.

Concerning managerial implications, it is important that hotel managers work on the different dimensions of experience, especially the sensory, affective and intellectual aspects as they are the ones that seem to contribute the most to the formation of the brand experience construct, in an upscale hotel setting. Concerning the sensory dimension, hotel managers are advised to work on the atmospheric cues (e.g. decoration, facilities and amenities, design, architecture, Food & Beverages, light, scent, music) in a holistic and coherent way, so that these stimuli deliver a coherent message along the customer journey that is unique, memorable and in line with the brand positioning. The affective aspect of the experience is related to the feelings and emotions that customers have towards the brand. As recognized by hotel managers in Study three, for upscale hotels this is a key element of the experience, and the attitudes and behaviors of the hotel employees are critical to create and maintain the customers´ feelings and emotions towards the hotel brand. For that to happen, employees´ recruitment process, training on the job and daily living the mission and the vision of the brand are essential. Finally, the intellectual part of the experience is about stimulating customers´ curiosity and knowledge. Upscale hotels can, in fact, be places where customers can learn and increase their knowledge. For instance, books, pictures and videos help to convey the history of the hotel or the history and cultural characteristics of the country and region where the hotel is located. For this upscale segment, managers are advised, not only to provide experiences to guests, but also to increase customers´

knowledge about the activities that are being performed in the hotel or in the region. This means that hotels can move from merely experience providers to knowledge enablers. As stated by hotel managers in Study three, customers value to learn something from the experience and, specifically in the case of more sophisticated customers, they value to "take something back with them".

Another recommendation would be to focus on brand authenticity perceptions, specifically, building on the unique aspects of the hotel brand (originality dimension) and also on ensuring that what is communicated to customers in all the brand touchpoints is, in fact, what is delivered (genuineness). As recognized by the hotel managers in Study three, atmospheric cues like the decoration, architecture, perfume, lights, amenities or Food & Beverages are very important because, by getting in contact with these kinds of stimuli, guests realize what are the unique aspects of the hotel. Moreover, guests can confirm, in a tangible way, if what is communicated by the hotel is, in fact, what is delivered by the service provider. Therefore, hotel managers are advised to develop atmospheric cues that are in line with the hotel brand positioning. It is recommended that the exploration of these unique and genuine aspects are not only related with the hotel, but also with the region where the hotel is integrated. Providing unique experiences that can only be lived in that place because they are embedded in the culture and traditions of that specific region, is an important element of differentiation. Another key vehicle to convey authenticity is the hotel staff. The way the service is provided needs to reflect the brand promise. Therefore, as stated in Study three, it is important to maintain the right balance between employees following the operational procedures and, at the same time, being natural and spontaneous.

Finally, hotel managers should be focused on creating and maintaining a strong relationship with customers. They are advised to explore specifically the absorption, attention and enthusiasm dimensions of customer engagement because they emerge, in this study, as the most relevant for the formation of the overall construct of customer engagement. In fact, by creating unique and memorable experiences during the stay at the hotel, customers will tend to be absorbed by the experience. Moreover, concerning the emotional (enthusiasm) dimension of engagement, as recognized by hotel managers in Study three, it is many times established by the hotel employees. In their interactions with customers, they are able to create an emotional bond with guests. This is why recruitment and training of hotel staff is key, so that employees are able to deliver a unique, personalized and even a surprising service that is valued, especially, in high-end segments. Finally, the attention dimension is stimulated mainly through the cognitive aspect of the relationship. For this, offline and online mechanisms like e-mails,

newsletters and social media are important vehicles to spread hotel news and inform customers about what is happening in the hotel, not only during the stay, but also after the stay. However, as stated by the interviewees in Study three, it is important to know the customers and understand how each customer would like to engage with the hotel as this relationship cannot be standardized.

As with any other research, this study has limitations that can present avenues for future research. Firstly, our data were based on convenience sampling. Therefore, future studies may replicate the proposed model using a more representative sample. Secondly, although we have introduced in the model antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity and customer engagement, the values of R^2 and Q^2 of brand authenticity indicate that future studies may include other exogenous variables and increase the predictive power and the predictive relevance of the model. In fact, atmospheric cues (indexical and iconic) could be introduced in the model and tested as an antecedent of brand authenticity. Thirdly, the scale employed to measure brand authenticity was adapted from Akbar and Wymer (2017), as it had already been applied to the hotel context, for example, by Mody and Hanks (2019). However, other studies allude to different dimensions like the continuity dimension included in the scales developed by Bruhn et al. (2012) and Morhart et al. (2015) or the reliability dimension included in other studies (Bruhn et al., 2012; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018). Furthermore, from Study three, we concluded that a specific dimension concerning the integration of the hotel in the local environment and local culture, is also recognized. So, future studies could develop an integrated scale exploring the dimensions of originality, genuineness, reliability, continuity and integration in local environment and local culture to be empirically applied to the hotel setting. Fourthly, although control variables (gender and age) have been studied to understand if they would display differences between groups, other variables could be studied. Different cultures (cross-cultural analysis) could be analyzed as a moderating variable to understand how the established relationships would change, taking into account different cultural backgrounds. Another suggestion for future research could be to use destination as a moderating variable, for instance, comparing emerging and developed destination markets. The main travel motivation (leisure vs business) and the customers´ personality traits could also be used as a moderator variable. Moreover, based on hotel segmentation, it would be interesting that future studies analyze if the relationships established in this study would sustain for an economy hotel. Finally, future studies may also analyze other constructs or some dimensions of other constructs as moderator variables. For instance, taking into account the brand coolness construct, it would

be interesting to understand how the exciting/energetic or the iconic dimensions of brand coolness may change or impact the strength of the established relationships.

In the next chapter we will present Study five. The main objectives of Study five are to enlighten the questionnaire results and to address some topics that haven´t been covered with the survey in Study four.

7. Study Five- Customers´ perspectives

Study five- presented in this chapter- captures customers´ perspectives on the constructs being analyzed, namely, brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity and their outcomes, in the context of upscale hotels. This chapter is structured as follows: introduction, methodology of the study, findings and, finally, discussion and conclusions.

7.1 Introduction

The main aim of the current study (Study five) is to enlighten the Study four questionnaire´s results and to address some topics that have not been covered with the survey in Study four. Specifically, the objectives of the current study are i) to give insights to enable a deeper understanding of the relationships established in Study four, ii) to deeper explore the most relevant dimensions of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity iii) to explore the stimuli/ atmospheric cues of both brand experience and brand authenticity and iv) to give insights about the impact of Covid-19 situation on the relevance of the analyzed constructs.

7.2 Methodology

A qualitative approach is applied in Study five and Focus Groups with guests are used as the tool to collect the data.

7.2.1 Sample characteristics

Two focus groups were held in June 2020 and in July 2020, respectively. Participants for each group were selected using a convenience, and also a snowball approach. The participants were selected because they share a specific characteristic that is relevant for the current study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) which, in this case, is the fact that they had been in an upscale hotel in the previous 12 months (the period between June 2019 and June 2020). Besides the mentioned criterion used to select the participants, we also used age as a criterion to compose the groups because we considered that different generations could have different perspectives on the topics under study, especially in the case of the topic related to the impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic situation in tourism in general and in upscale hotels, in particular. Therefore, two focus groups were held, one of them composed of 8 people who were less than 40 years old (Focus Group A) and the other focus group composed by 5 people who were more than 40 years old (Focus Group B). We decided to use the age of 40 as a threshold also because this was the age median value of the questionnaire´s participants. All group members are Portuguese and the groups are balanced regarding gender. Table 7.1 shows the participants´ characteristics of Focus Group A and Table 7.2 shows the participants´ characteristics of Focus Group B. They identify participants´ age and gender.

Table 7.1- Sample characteristics: Focus Group A

Participants	Age	Gender
A1	27	Female
A2	39	Female
A3	38	Male
A4	38	Female
A5	38	Male
A6	27	Male
A7	25	Female
A8	32	Female

Source: Author´s elaboration

Table 7.2- Sample characteristics: Focus Group B

Participants	Age	Gender
B1	41	Female
B2	76	Female
B3	41	Male
B4	53	Male
B5	50	Male

Source: Author´s elaboration

7.2.2 Focus Groups

The focus groups were held in Portuguese, therefore, the direct quotes from the focus groups, included in this thesis, have been translated from Portuguese to English by the researcher. The focus groups took place in June 2020 and July 2020 and were done online to ensure all the security and safety requirements due to the pandemic situation. The length of the two focus groups was 1h15 and 1h20, respectively.

The focus groups procedure began with an introduction to the research, explaining the goals of the study and also thanking people for their participation. Afterwards, the researcher, acting as moderator, asked for permission to record the session and explained the reasons for this procedure, also explaining that data would be anonymized. The conventions of the focus group participation were also presented, highlighting the fact that each person should speak at a time, that everybody´s views were important and that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Concerning the questioning strategies employed, a more structured approach was used to cover all the topics. The moderator opened the discussion with more general, open-ended introductory questions so that participants could feel more comfortable with the topics under study, and then moved into more specific questions. Annex C presents the topic guide used for the Focus groups and addresses the following topics/ themes: introduction, brand experience, customer engagement, brand authenticity, relationships among the concepts, main outcomes and COVID-19 and after COVID-19 pandemic situation. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with the participants´ authorization.

7.2.3 Data Analysis

In Study five, content analysis is also applied, using the NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020). The process followed to analyze the data is the same as in Study three. As explained before, the process is suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and has 7 phases: 1) organizing the data, 2) immersion in the data, 3) identify possible categories and themes and generate case summaries, 4) coding the data, 5) offering interpretations and producing analytical memos, 6) searching for alternative interpretations, and 7) writing the report. The software is a relevant tool for content analysis as it facilitates the exploration of patterns in the answers and the creation of codes that are common themes emerging from the data. The coding was guided by previous literature reviews on brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement and also emerged from the data collected. The analysis was iterative as we kept moving backwards and forwards between the data to have a deeper understanding of the

phenomena and to realize if other possible interpretations could also be explored. We followed the procedure suggested by Rego, Cunha and Polónia (2017). First, "the features of the topic as expressed directly by interviewees were identified and then organized into tentative clusters of similarity and distinction" (Rego et al., 2017, p. 138). These clusters are referred as first-order constructs. Then, those first-order constructs were grouped into second-order groups, according to similarities and differences or other forms of relationships between them. Finally, second-order constructs were grouped into more abstract concepts and are referred as third-order constructs.

7.3 Findings

Table 7.3 presents the codes that have emerged from the data analysis, organized by third-order, second-order and first-order constructs. Based on the focus groups performed, we realize that the sub-themes (second-order constructs) associated with the construct of Brand Experience (third-order construct) in upscale hotels are: i) characteristics of the customer experience, ii) elements that influence this experience (atmospheric elements) and iii) other relevant factors.

Concerning the construct of Customer Engagement (third-order construct), the associated sub-themes (second-order constructs) that emerge from the focus groups are, firstly, the specific characteristics of engagement and, secondly, the mechanism used by the hotels to establish and maintain the engagement with guests.

Regarding the Brand Authenticity construct (third-order construct), the sub-themes (second-order constructs) of authenticity characteristics and the elements (human element and atmospheric elements) that influence the perception of authenticity in upscale hotels, emerge from the focus groups.

The relationships among the concepts of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity are also a topic under study, as well as their possible outcomes. Concerning possible outcomes, data are organized within the sub-categories (second-order constructs) of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes.

Finally, the participants´ opinions of how COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 impact the analyzed constructs (Brand Experience, the Customer Engagement and the Brand Authenticity perceptions) and traveling in general, as well as hotels´ new requirements in this new reality, also emerge as sub-themes from the focus groups.

Table 7.3- Data codes: first-order, second-order and third-order constructs

Third-order construct (theme)	Second-order construct (sub-theme)	First-order construct (sub-theme)
Brand Experience	Experience characteristics	Sensorial characteristics
		Emotional characteristics
	Elements (atmospherics)	Food & Beverages
		Design
		Facilities & amenities
		Room space
		Decoration
		Sound
		Light
		Architecture
	Other relevant factors	Location
		Surprise factor
		Traveling motive
		Cleaning aspect
		Guest service
		Activities
Customer Engagement	Engagement characteristics	Emotional characteristics
	Engagement mechanisms	Loyalty programs
Brand Authenticity	Authenticity characteristics	Familiarity
		Uniqueness
		Genuineness
		Integration in local environment and local culture
		Delivering the brand promise
		Consistency
	Human element	Human interactions
	Elements (atmospherics)	Food & Beverages
		Architecture
Relationships among the concepts	Mechanisms	Identified paths

Third-order construct (theme)	Second-order construct (sub-theme)	First-order construct (sub-theme)
Outcomes	Behavioral	Recommendation
		Return (repurchase)
	Attitudinal	Top of mind
		Disposition to forgive
COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19	Hotels´ new requirements	Possibility to be isolated
		Safety and Security procedures
		Exterior space
		Size (small hotels)
	Traveling	The need to travel
		Generational differences
	Impact of COVID-19 on the analyzed constructs	Customer Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.3.1 Brand Experience

In this sub-chapter, we discuss the conceptualizations of Brand Experience. When we asked upscale hotel customers to describe their last experience in an upscale hotel and to refer to the most important aspects of that experience, three sub-themes emerged: the characteristics of the experience, the elements (atmospherics) that the hotel needs to have to achieve the expected experience and other relevant factors. Concerning the experience characteristics, in focus group A, 7 participants (88%) address to the sensorial part of the experience. For instance, the hotel smell is referred by Participant A4 who states that "One thing that I value is the smell. There are hotels that have a very characteristic smell, perfume. I don´t know where they put it, but it is very pleasant and it´s not easy to reproduce at home". The sense of taste has also been addressed as different participants recognize the importance of breakfast in an upscale hotel. For example, Participant A1 recognizes that "another thing that I value the most is the quality of breakfast" and Participant A3 describes in detail the food that was included in the hotel breakfast, when referring to a memorable experience in an upscale hotel. The sense of hearing has also been pointed out as Participant A6 refers to the importance of having rooms that have sound isolation and Participant A8 considers that upscale hotels should neither be noisy, nor have too many people. In focus group B, the sense of taste was underlined by 3 participants

(60%). Participant B3, when referring to the importance of breakfast, even states that "5-star hotels that do not have a natural orange juice, should not be considered 5-star hotels".

Although not so frequently mentioned as the sensorial characteristics of experience, the emotional part of the experience in upscale hotels has also been mentioned by 1 participant in focus group A (13%) and 1 participant in focus group B (20%). Participant A2 told a story that happened 10 years ago and explained that "I remember that during my stay at that hotel, there was a CD playing that I enjoyed a lot. At the end of the vacations, the hotel sent me the CD, together with a letter thanking me for the stay. Sometimes I listen to that CD, and I still remember those vacations. It´s amazing! These small details make the difference". In focus group B, Participant B3 recognizes that "when the hotel understands and adapts to our needs, it moves from the functional aspect (a place to sleep, a clean room, taps that work correctly, not too much noise) to the emotional aspect. The staff made a strong effort so that I could have an extraordinary experience, and this makes me move to the next level. Without the emotional part, the experience is ok. For me, this is one of the most important things. People (hotel employees) and their attitudes can transform an average experience into an extraordinary experience".

Another sub-theme that emerges from the experience topic are the elements (atmospherics) that customers recognize as being key to deliver the experience: design, sound, light, architecture, Food & Beverages, facilities and amenities, room space and decoration. All of these elements were spontaneously mentioned by the participants. In fact, in focus group A and B, all the participants referred at least one of the mentioned elements. For example, in focus group A, Participant A3 states that "I value hotels that have minimalist elements, and also elements of design. Hotels where we can find things that we don´t have in our everyday life". In focus group A, facilities and amenities are highlighted (eg. accesses to the beach, gym, bar, swimming pool), as well as in focus group B (eg. spa and internet speed). However, Food & Beverages is the most referred element in both groups. The quality and diversity of the food, especially for breakfast, as well as the possibility to have flexible breakfast schedules that can start before the "usual" time for breakfast and end up after the "usual" time, is something that is widely appreciated and considered important for an upscale hotel. The first-order constructs and second-order constructs "Experience characteristics" and "Elements (atmospherics)" associated with Brand Experience, are represented in Figure 7.1.

Besides the atmospheric elements that guests recognized as being key to deliver the experience, other relevant factors have been pointed out. The hotel location, the cleaning aspect of the hotel, as well as the activities provided by the hotel are considered important factors for

the hotel to deliver a very good experience to its gests. Moreover, the traveling motive (business vs leisure) has been considered an important factor that has a strong influence on the hotel experience. For instance, in focus group A, Participant A7 states that "For me, it depends on the type of trip and with whom I am traveling". In focus group B, Participant B1 recognizes that "For me, my hotel experiences can be divided in two types: when I am going for leisure, with my family, and when I am going for work, in business". Participant B3 adds that while going in business, the functional aspect is more important: "When we travel for business, the fact that we often stay in the same hotel chain, gives us a familiarity feeling and when we travel frequently, it gives us the idea that although we are not at home, we know what we will find". However, when referring to leisure trips, Participant B3 states that "when I travel for leisure, with the family, I try to run away from cities and try new things, different, that can surprise me". In fact, the surprise element has also been considered a relevant factor for participants in both groups. For instance, in focus group A, Participant A3 recognizes that "This surprise is also important. In this type of hotel, the surprise factor is also important, and we feel very pleased". Finally, guest service in this type of hotel is also perceived to be key, in order to deliver the experience. A high level of service, as described by the participants, includes the hotel´s ability to solve the problems that can occur during the stay, in case they occur, a personalized service that makes guests feel unique, nice and empathic staff, reliability of the hotel services, attention to details, attention to the guests´ needs and differentiation of the services provided. Indeed, guest service was the most frequently referred aspect within the sub-theme "other relevant factors", mentioned by 4 participants of focus group A (50%) and by all the participants of focus group B. The first-order constructs and second-order construct "Other relevant factors" associated with Brand Experience, are represented in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.1- First-order constructs and second-order constructs "Experience characteristics" and "Elements (atmospherics)" associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
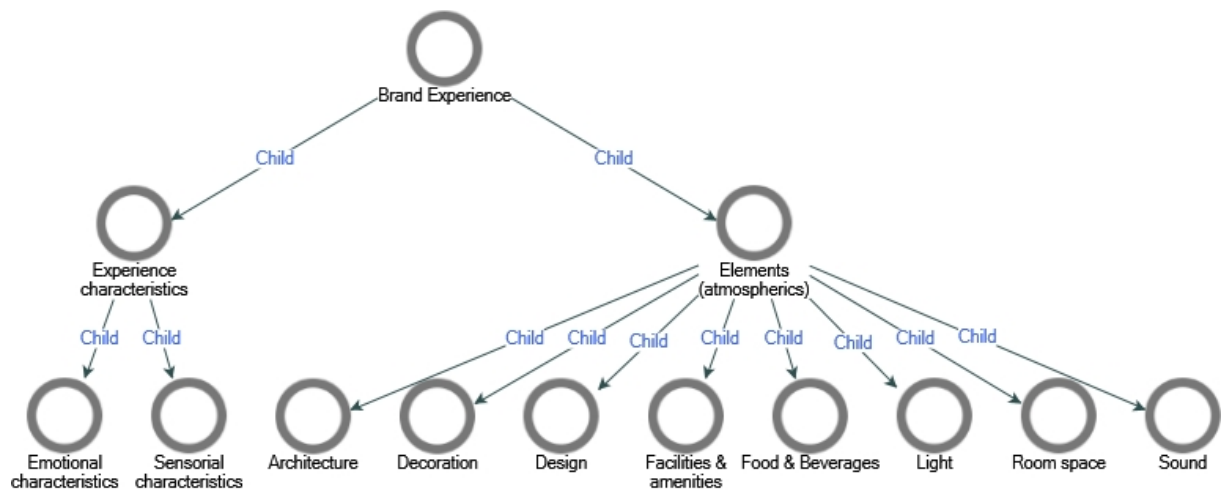
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Figure 7.2- First-order constructs and second-order construct "Other relevant factors" associated with Brand Experience (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
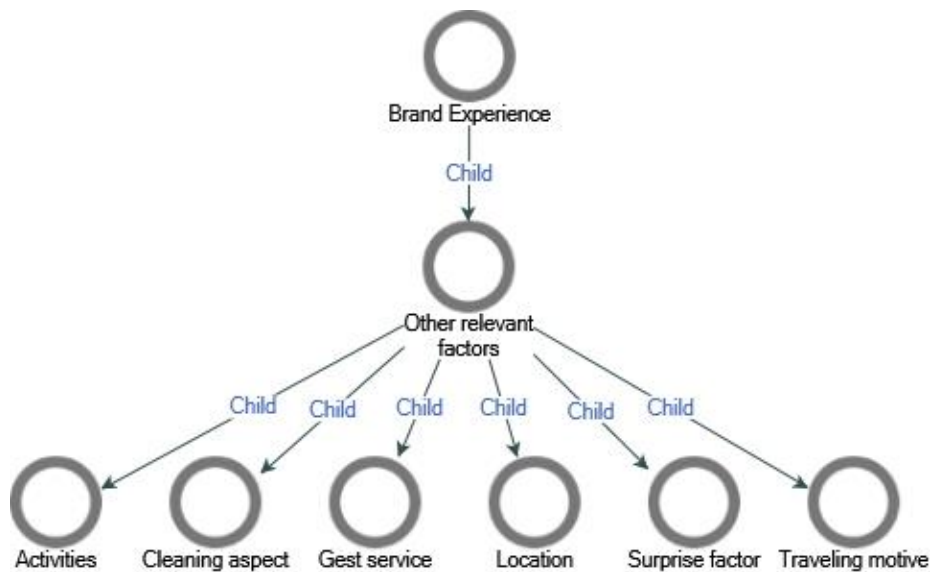
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.3.2 Customer Engagement

Another topic covered by the focus groups was the topic of customer engagement. Within this topic, two sub-themes emerged: engagement characteristics and engagement mechanisms. Concerning engagement characteristics, 2 participants in focus group A (25%) recognize that

they have a strong bond, relationship with specific hotel brands. Participant A2 and Participant A5 both describe very good experiences they had while they were staying in specific hotel brands and say that these unique experiences make them want to stay in that hotel brand, whenever they travel to a different country. Regarding engagement mechanisms, in focus group B, 2 participants (40%) refer that they have hotel loyalty cards and they both recognize that loyalty programs are important because they enable guests to accumulate points/ credits that can be converted into different things. These participants agree that loyalty programs are especially useful when they travel for business because they tend to stay in the same hotel brand when they travel for business, to different countries. They state that the main reason for this is a functional reason. Participant B5 explains that "the main reason is functionality, convenience and knowing how things work. The check-in, the check-out, everything works in the same way". The first-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Customer Engagement, are represented in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3- First-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Customer Engagement (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
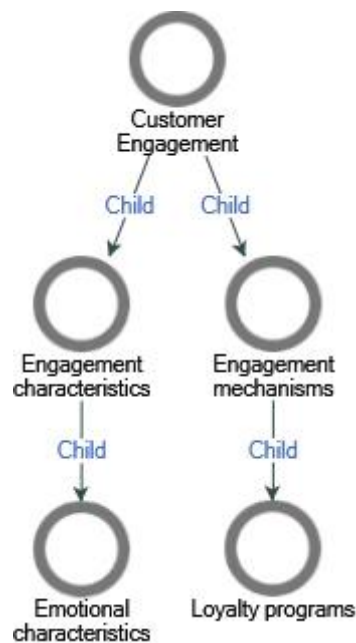
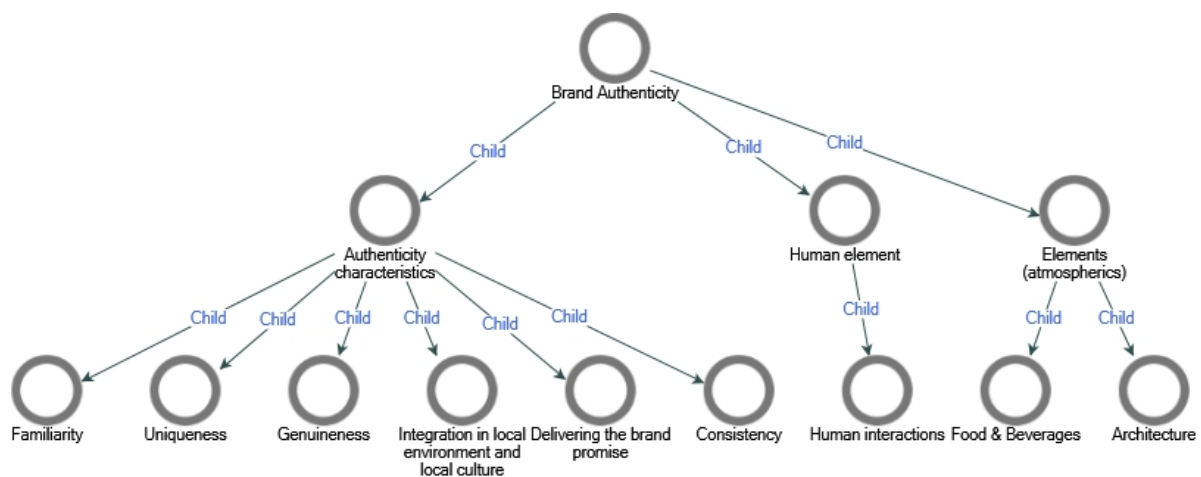Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.3.3 Brand Authenticity

When addressing the topic of brand authenticity, three sub-themes arise: authenticity characteristics, the elements (atmospherics) that an upscale hotel needs to have to be perceived as authentic and the human element. When asked to explain and describe what an authentic hotel is, some participants reacted with surprise. For instance, Participant A4, when asked about the topic, says "When you make this question, my immediate answer would be "what is she asking?" However, if I think a little bit, what comes to my mind…" and Participant A6 asks "what are you referring to when you talk about an authentic hotel?". However, after reflecting on the topic, participants refer to different characteristics that, in their opinion, can make a hotel authentic. These characteristics are: familiarity, genuineness, delivering the brand promise, consistency, uniqueness and integration in local environment and local culture. The authenticity characteristics more often referred and addressed by more participants are uniqueness, genuineness and integration in local environment and local culture. Firstly, concerning the genuineness characteristic, this topic was addressed by 5 participants in focus group A (63%) and was not addressed in focus group B. In focus group A, this characteristic was associated with the hotel employees. For example, Participant A6 says that "it is related with hotel employees having a genuine smile on their faces when they talk to me" and Participant A7 adds that "…I associate it with people, with the service, and I think it is related with the culture of the place we are in". Secondly, the integration in local environment and local culture was referred by 1 participant (13%) in focus group A and 3 participants (60%) in focus group B. For Participant A8 "that hotel could only exist in that place. That hotel in another place would not make sense. It´s the perfect fit" and Participant B4 states that "for me, it is more related with the location, the hotel integration in the environment. It has to be integrated in the landscape, in the surroundings". Thirdly, the uniqueness characteristic has been underlined by 1 participant (13%) from group A and 2 participants (40%) from group B. Participant A2 considers that a hotel is authentic if it has "…an own identity. Being authentic is having an identity. It doesn´t matter if the hotel is big or small. It has to be, somehow, unique, with unique characteristics and this makes the hotel different from others". Participant B3 says that "the first thing that comes to my mind is unrepeatable. An authentic hotel is original, hard to copy". Other characteristics have also been mentioned. Participant A6 considers that an authentic hotel needs to transmit a sense of familiarity. For Participant B3 and Participant B5 an authentic hotel needs to deliver what it promises to customers, what is communicated to customers and, finally, for Participants A2 and A3, an authentic hotel brand needs to be consistent in all the services that it provides, and this consistency needs to be found in all the hotels belonging to the same brand.

Concerning the elements that a hotel needs to have to be perceived as authentic by customers, besides the human element (hotel staff) that has been recognized as very important to convey a perception of genuineness, other elements (atmospherics) are referred. For instance, Food & Beverages. Having high quality products, that can only be found in that place or region is considered authentic. The other mentioned element is the architecture as it is stated that authenticity can also be perceived based on the hotel´s architecture. The first-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Brand Authenticity, are represented in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.4- First-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Brand Authenticity (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.3.4 Relationships among the concepts and outcomes

Considering customers´ perspectives, some relationships among the concepts seem to emerge from the focus groups. A very good, memorable and unique experience seems to be a required element for customers to create a bond with the hotel brand, which means that guests will tend to think more often about that hotel and, consequently, recommend it and return. In fact, when asked about what they considered to be the main outcomes when a hotel is able to provide a memorable experience, is perceived as being authentic and is able to create a relationship with guests, two main behavioral outcomes stand out: recommend and return. Three participants (38%) from focus group A and 1 participant (20%) from focus group B consider that when they have a very good experience in a hotel, they recommend it to family and friends, although they do not recommend it through social media. Five participants (63%) from focus group A and 1 participant (20%) from focus group B say that when they have extraordinary and memorable

experiences in a specific hotel, they want to come back. Moreover, besides the behavioral outcomes of recommendation and return, other outcomes are acknowledged by participants. For instance, Participant B3 states that, when a hotel provides a memorable experience, is perceived as being authentic and is able to create a relationship with guests, it is likely to stay in the top of mind of customers, even if it is unconsciously. Participants B3 and B5 also add that when a customer has several great experiences in a hotel, it is easier to "forgive" a small service failure. The first-order and second-order constructs associated with the themes "Relationships among the concepts" and "Outcomes" are represented in Figure 7.5 and 7.6.

Figure 7.5- First-order and second-order constructs associated with Relationships among the concepts (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

Figure 7.6- First-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Outcomes (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)

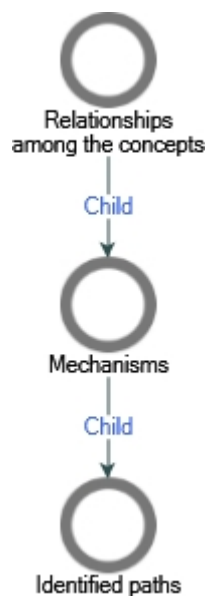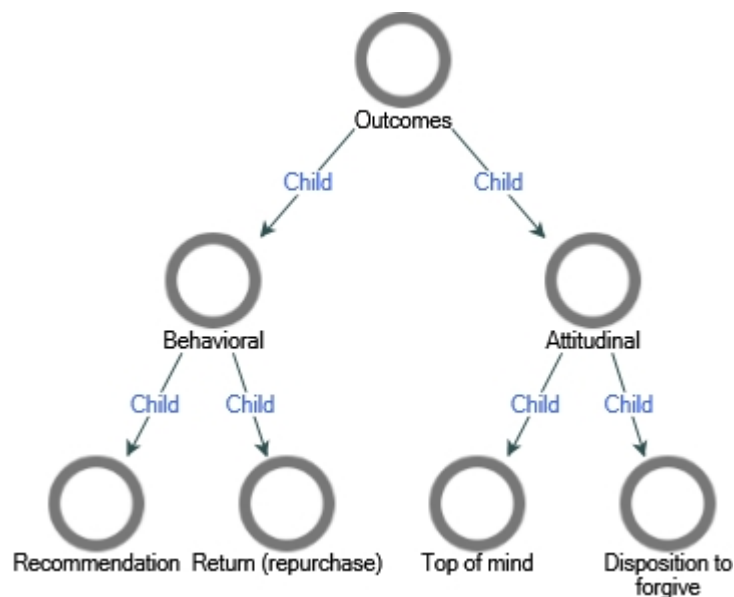Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.3.5 Covid-19 and Post-Covid-19

The last topic covered in the focus groups was COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 situation, as we wanted to understand how customers perceived the impact of the global "new reality", imposed by COVID-19 pandemic situation. Moreover, we wanted to gain insights about how this pandemic situation could impact their willingness to return to an upscale hotel, as well as their perception about the relevance of the topics under study, in the short and in the long run. Associated with this main topic, three sub-themes arise: hotels´ new requirements in this new situation, the impact of COVID-19 on traveling and its impact on brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity.

Concerning hotels´ new requirements in this "new reality", most participants highlighted the importance of the safety and security procedures (eg. the use of face masks, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, rooms cleaning) that have been implemented by hotels. Five participants (63%) in focus group A and 2 participants in focus group B consider that these measures and procedures are very important and needed during the pandemic situation and they also believe that some of these procedures will still be present in a post-COVID-19 situation. Participant A6 says that, at this moment, these kind of safety and security procedures are a "must" for upscale and luxury hotels because hotels that position themselves in the high-end segment are required

to have these safety and security procedures well developed and implemented. Participant A1 adds to that, stating that, under these new circumstances, premium hotels and restaurants are better as they can ensure a better and more secure service. Participants also recognize they would prefer a hotel that has a safety and security certification because they would feel more confident and safer. Besides looking for hotels that have clear safety and security procedures implemented, participants also state that they would prefer upscale hotels that would give them the possibility to be more isolated, hotels that have exterior space and even smaller hotels.

When asked about traveling again and returning to a hotel, three different attitudes seem to exist. Three participants in focus group A (38%) and 1 participant in focus group B (20%) state that they would travel again and stay in an upscale hotel, as soon as the restrictions disappear. For instance, Participant A1 says that "if I could travel now, I would go". Other participants say that to travel again and to feel comfortable in a hotel, they would check if the safety and security procedures are being implemented and add that they would probably look for more isolated hotels, with exterior space or smaller hotels. Finally, 1 participant in focus group B (Participant B2) clearly states that "I am not going to travel in the near future because this is a global problem. It´s not a problem of a single country and we do not know what we will find in another country". Participant A7 states that this is a "generational matter" and explains that "I usually make these trips with my parents, and they have already said that they would not travel in the next years…but, for me, I could travel now. I would go this Summer, without any problem". Moreover, the topic about traveling with kids was also raised as 2 participants stated that they wouldn´t mind traveling with adults, in the current circumstances, but they would not do it with kids as they feel it´s a higher risk. Finally, when asked about the impact of Covid-19 on the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity), participant B2 considers that "We´ll need to see how things will evolve and how we can adjust" and participants B3 and B5 mention that brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity will still be relevant. Participant B3 considers that "if hotels have an emotional differentiation, they are in a high segment, deliver a unique experience, they will survive better than the others. Eventually, they will end up even better than before Covid-19". Participant B5 finalizes saying that "we will continue to ask for unique experiences and for differentiating factors, in a post-Covid-19 phase". The first-order and second-order constructs associated with Covid-19 and Post-Covid-19 are represented in Figure 7.7.

Figure 7.7- First-order constructs and second-order constructs associated with Covid-19 and Post-Covid-19 (Project Map based on final codes, NVivo)
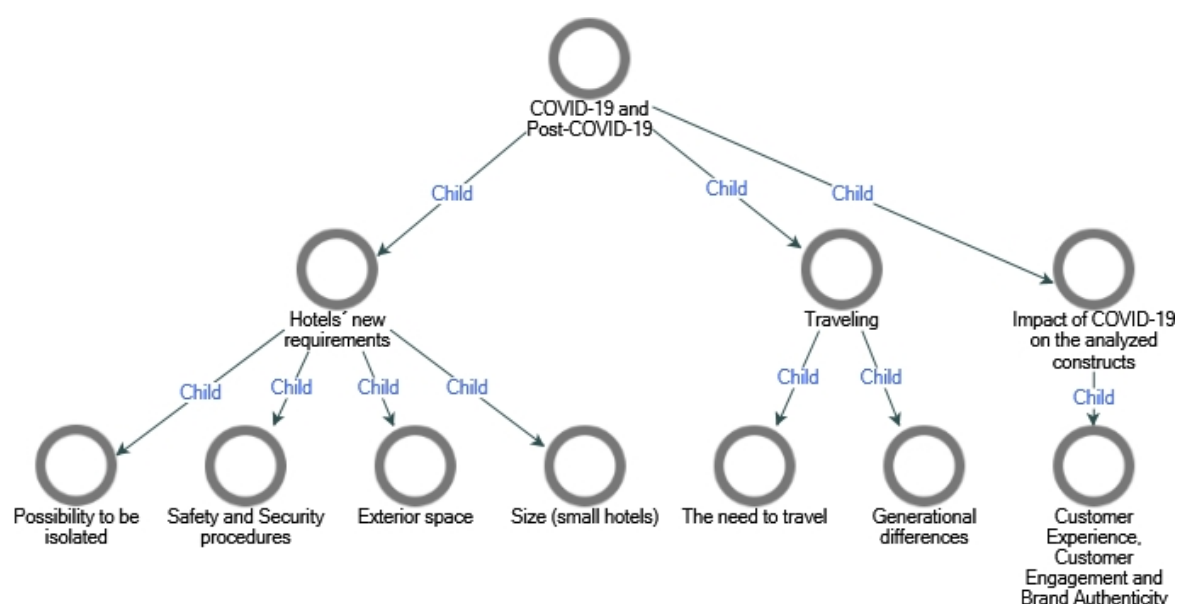
Source: Author´s elaboration based on NVivo output

7.4 Discussion and conclusions

This study (Study five) attempts to enlighten Study four questionnaire´s results, namely, concerning the main dimensions of the constructs and the relationships established among the constructs. Moreover, it also aims to study topics that have not been covered in Study four. Specifically, explore the stimuli/ atmospheric cues of both brand experience and brand authenticity. Finally, the current study (Study five) aims to give insights about the impact of Covid-19 situation on the analyzed constructs.

Firstly, findings emerging from the focus groups point out the relevance of the sensorial dimension of brand experience, followed by the emotional dimension. In fact, when asked to describe their experiences in upscale hotels, we conclude that experience is strongly connected to the 5 senses. Moreover, based on the concrete examples given by the participants, we also realize that a unique and memorable experience creates feelings and emotions. This is in line with the conclusions arising from Study three as the majority of the interviewees (managers) considered that the experience in an upscale hotel is connected to the five senses (sensorial) and also to feelings and emotions (emotional). In Study four, based on questionnaires filled out by upscale hotel customers, the sensory (sensorial), affective (emotional) and intellectual dimensions emerge as the most relevant to form the brand experience construct.

Secondly, the emotional characteristics of engagement, in other words, the emotional bonds established between the customers and the hotel, seem to emerge as the most important dimension of customer engagement, as in Study three where the emotional characteristics are the most referred characteristics of engagement. In Study four, besides the enthusiasm dimension, which is related to the emotional characteristics of engagement, the dimensions of absorption and attention also emerge as the most relevant in shaping the overall engagement concept.

Thirdly, concerning brand authenticity characteristics, applied to upscale hotels, the findings emerging from the focus groups point out to three main dimensions: integration in local environment and local culture, uniqueness and genuineness. Although other characteristics have also been underlined, these were the ones highlighted by a higher number of participants. From customers´ perspectives, an authentic hotel is integrated in the destination, is unique (original, has a specific identity) and is genuine (true, natural). These conclusions are in line with the findings from Study three as managers also recognize these dimensions as key to characterize an authentic hotel. However, managers also identify other dimensions as relevant to form the brand authenticity construct, when applied to an upscale hotel. From Study four, we realize that genuineness and originality are considered relevant dimensions of the brand authenticity construct, reinforcing the findings of the current study (Study five).

Fourthly, the spontaneous relationship that seems to arise from the focus groups relates brand experience with customer engagement and brand loyalty (recommend and willingness to return). A very good, memorable and unique experience seems to be a required element for customers to create a bond with the hotel brand, which means that guests will tend to think more often about that hotel and, consequently, recommend it and return. This supports one of the conclusions of Study four as brand experience→ customer engagement→ behavioral intentions (loyalty) (β=0.295, p<0.001) seems a strong relationship. Moreover, findings from Study three point to the same direction as managers recognize that there is an apparent relationship among the constructs of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity. Moreover, it is also recognized that experience is the construct that "comes first", and several outcomes are identified, being the most relevant the behavioral outcomes (recommendation, positive WOM, return/ repurchase and guests becoming brand ambassadors).

Fifthly, the current study also addressed topics that were not covered in Study four, namely, the elements/ stimuli that guests considered essential for the hotel to provide the expected experience, and also the elements that help to convey the authenticity of an upscale hotel. The

elements (atmospherics) identified as important to convey the experience are Food & Beverages, hotel design, facilities and amenities, room space, hotel decoration, sound, light and architecture. These elements are, in fact, consistent with the ones identified by managers in Study three. Concerning the stimuli that guests consider relevant cues for authenticity, Food & Beverages and the hotel architecture emerge, spontaneously, from the focus groups. This finds a parallel with the managers´ point of view (Study three) who have also identified these elements as important authenticity cues, among others. As in Study three, in the current study, hotel employees (human element) are perceived by the participants as an important vehicle of authenticity.

Finally, when asked about the impact of Covid-19 pandemic situation on their willingness to return to an upscale hotel and on their future experience in this type of hotels, we realize that guests consider that hotels now have new requirements. Among these new requirements, the safety and security procedures (eg. the use of face masks, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, rooms cleaning) that have been implemented by hotels in general, stand out to ensure customers´ confidence in the hotel brand, as in Study three. Moreover, the existence of a safety and security certification is also referred as an element that increases customers´ confidence on the hotel brand. However, the expectation is that high-end hotels would have all these procedures implemented and that they would be a safer choice compared to other not so premium alternatives. Other characteristics like the possibility to be more isolated in the hotel, smaller hotels or hotels that have big exterior spaces also seem to be preferred. When asked about traveling again and returning to an upscale hotel, three different attitudes seem to exist. There are guests who would like to travel again, as soon as the restrictions disappear and others who say that, in order to travel again and to feel comfortable in a hotel, they would check if the safety and security procedures are being implemented. Finally, there is also a more conservative position as one of the participants is not planning to travel in the near future due to the COVID-19 situation. It is also suggested that age can play an important role as older guests can be more reluctant to travel and return to hotels in the short term. Finally, we can also conclude that Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity will still be relevant in a Post-COVID-19 phase, supporting hospitality managers´ opinions, from Study three.

This study, as any other research, has limitations. The focus groups have been run in a specific moment in time (June 2020 and July 2020), when there were several restrictions to traveling, there was a lockdown and the COVID-19 vaccine was not available. Therefore, it is likely that, as the global health situation evolves, customers´ opinions also evolve, especially concerning the topic of the impact of COVID-19 on traveling and on the hotel experience.

Another limitation that can be associated to the focus group tool is the possibility of opinion contamination among focus groups´ participants. In fact, while running focus groups, it is possible that one person´s opinion influences the rest of the group. However, to avoid this situation during the focus groups, the moderator has always tried to involve all the participants in the discussion, asking if there were more opinions and perspectives on the topics. Despite the limitations, this study helps to triangulate the data with Study three and Study four and leads to important insights concerning brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity, in an upscale hotel setting.

8. Final conclusions and implications

This chapter highlights the main conclusions of this thesis, linking the conclusions that emerge from each study and addressing the research questions. We identify the main conclusions, underline the theoretical and managerial contributions and describe the limitations, as well as paths for future research.

8.1 Main conclusions

The major motivation for this thesis was to understand how the concepts of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity are perceived and how they relate to each other in the hospitality field, more specifically, in upscale hotels. This thesis captured the perspective of different stakeholders, namely, hospitality managers and customers, to have a holistic and integrated understanding of the phenomena. Based on the identified knowledge gaps, this thesis aimed to: i) increase the empirical evidence of customer experience in the hotel industry, ii) have a deeper understanding of the relationship between customer experience and other key marketing concepts, in the hospitality setting, iii) study authenticity in hotels as it is still understudied in this setting, iv) explore the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity, v) have a deeper knowledge about customer engagement and customer engagement behaviors in the hospitality industry and vi) explore specific relationships between customer engagement and other related marketing constructs. To achieve these objectives seven different research questions were identified. The research questions guide the presentation of conclusions.

Research question i: ***"What marketing research has been conducted on customer engagement until now and what could be future avenues for research?"***

Study one- Systematic literature review Customer Engagement (chapter 3 of this thesis) addresses directly the first research question. Based on the systematic literature review conducted, we can conclude that customer engagement has a key role within the marketing field. Firstly, the increasing number of studies about the topic, published in different peer-reviewed journals within the marketing, business in general and tourism and hospitality fields reflects the increasing interest of researchers on customer engagement. Secondly, the diversity of authorship and the diversity of industries and geographies where studies are taking place also

show that the topic has gained importance worldwide. Thirdly, concerning the methodologies used, empirical studies have been the most common. Fourthly, despite the different theoretical backgrounds found, relationship marketing and the service-dominant logic seem to be the most common theoretical foundations, from which customer engagement emerges. Although relationship marketing and the service-dominant logic are the most common foundations of the analysed studies, a customer engagement theory seems to be emerging, as the importance of the topic justifies what seems to be a path to the creation of a specific engagement theory.

Fifthly, different definitions of engagement are presented in the marketing literature and several terms, such as "consumer engagement", "customer engagement", "brand engagement", "actor engagement" or "customer engagement behaviours" are also referred. Sixthly, customer engagement is mainly perceived as a multidimensional construct, where the cognitive, affective/emotional, behavioural and social dimensions are the most frequently used. Despite the number of definitions presented, we can claim that customer engagement is perceived by many scholars as the connection (being it through behavioural manifestations, state of mind...) established between the customer/ consumer and a focal object (a firm or a brand) that goes beyond the purchase.

Seventhly, different scales -applying different engagement dimensions- have also been proposed and some of them have been identified as specific context/industry scales (e.g., scales applied specifically to the hospitality industry or for online or social media context). It would be interesting to understand if new studies will continue the trend to develop scales for specific contexts and industries or if there will be an effort to create a global scale, able to be applied in different geographies and industries.

Eighthly, concerning the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement, different constructs have been identified, affecting directly or indirectly customer engagement, separately or in combinations with each other. In the case of the antecedents, we may point out the following as the most often studied: Experience, Involvement, Brand/ Brand-page interactivity, Satisfaction and Trust. As for the consequences, a higher number of articles employs: Loyalty, Firm Performance, Word of Mouth (WOM), Satisfaction and Trust.

Finally, customer engagement seems to be perceived as a global concept. On the one hand, there is a global interest on the topic reflected on the diversity of authors studying the subject, and the diversity of industries and countries where the studies are taking place. On the other hand, the perception that customer engagement behaviours, such as Word of Mouth (positive or negative), giving recommendations or writing reviews can have a global impact.

Research question ii: ***"What marketing research has been conducted on brand authenticity until now and what could be future avenues for research?"***

Study two- Systematic literature review Brand Authenticity (chapter 4 of this thesis) aims to answer to the second research question. From the systematic literature review performed, we conclude that there is a high level of subjectivity associated with the authenticity construct and the existing fragmented knowledge is reflected on the different definitions and meanings associated with the term. Within the marketing field, when authenticity is applied in the context of brands, the construct of brand authenticity emerges. Firstly, the growing number of studies about the topic, published in different peer-reviewed journals, especially since 2012 on, highlights the increasing interest of researchers on brand authenticity. Secondly, the diversity of authors studying it, with the majority of articles being published by more than one author, as well as the geographical dispersion of studies, in different research contexts (industries analyzed), show the international and cross-market importance of brand authenticity. Concerning the methodologies applied, empirical studies have been the most common.

Thirdly, when analyzing the theoretical perspectives and the nature of authenticity, three types of authenticity seem to reach some level of agreement: objective, constructive, and existential authenticity. These types of authenticity are many times related to iconic and indexical cues that are considered essential to build the perception of authenticity.

Fourthly, despite the different definitions and meanings associated with the construct, what seems to be transversal is that brand authenticity is, many times, associated with a brand being real, genuine, true to itself and its consumers and with a consistent behavior, mirroring its values. Some attributes are also highlighted as they are considered fundamental for a brand to be perceived as authentic. Fifthly, the majority of the analyzed articles assume that authenticity and brand authenticity are multi-dimensional constructs and there are some scales, the ones developed by Bruhn et al. (2012), Napoli et al. (2014), Schallehn et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015), that seem to be a reference to measure brand authenticity.

Finally, concerning the antecedents and/or consequences of authenticity and brand authenticity, several constructs have been studied. However, especially in the case of the antecedents, the analysis presents challenges as some constructs have been considered, by some authors, as a dimension of authenticity/ brand authenticity and, by others, as an antecedent. In the case of the consequences, there seems to be more consensus and the ones that have been studied by more researchers are: purchase intention, expected quality, trust, perceived brand value and loyalty.

Research question iii: *"How are brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement perceived by practitioners in the hospitality context?"*

Study three- Managers´ perspectives, based on in-depth interviews (chapter 5 of this thesis) contributes to answer to the third research question. From the managers´ point of view, brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement are three relevant concepts in the hospitality field. In the case of the experience concept, it is perceived as extremely important, independently of the type of hotel or the customers´ motivations to stay in the hotel (business or leisure). Brand authenticity is also considered relevant and growing its importance in the context of upscale and luxury hotels, although its relevance depends on how the concept is interpreted, and customer engagement is also recognized as highly important, although managers highlight that it is not a "one size fits all", stating that firms need to understand how each customer would like to be engaged.

Firstly, concerning experience, creating unique and memorable experiences (especially for customers who travel for leisure) and delivering guest service excellency are considered the ultimate goals of upscale hotels. Secondly, managers also recognize that the hotel is not only an experience provider, but also an experience facilitator, establishing the bridge between hotel guests and the destination. Other relevant elements recognized by managers are the high quality of services, facilities and amenities and the hotel location. Findings from Study five-Customers´ perspectives, based on focus groups (chapter 7 of this thesis) corroborate some of these conclusions as customers also recognize that, in this type of hotel, the guest service, the location and the activities provided by the hotel are key factors for the hotel to deliver a very good experience to guests.

Thirdly, from Study three, the characteristics associated with brand experience are: sensorial, emotional, learning and transformational. The sensorial and emotional characteristics emerge as the main dimensions in the upscale setting. Atmospheric cues (facilities and amenities, decoration, design, architecture, food & beverages, colors and light and perfume) are also recognized by managers as essential elements to deliver the sensorial experience.

Fourthly, concerning customer engagement, the characteristics that managers associate with the term are: emotional, intellectual, identification and interaction. However, in the case of upscale hotels, findings point out to the dominance of the emotional dimension of engagement. The relationship established between hotel employees and customers – the human element- is considered key to achieve and maintain this emotional dimension. Other dimensions

of engagement are highlighted by managers, namely, interactions (whether online or offline) and identification (sense of belonging).

Fifthly, online mechanisms of engagement are also mentioned as very important to establish engagement, as technological developments and social media are increasing their role in consumers´ lives. However, managers raise the attention for firms not to make conclusions about the level of loyalty and customer engagement, based exclusively on how the customer interacts with the brand online, as not all the guests like to interact online. Besides the importance of the human element and the online mechanisms to create and maintain engagement, findings of Study three also reveal that the experiences and the relationship established between the hotel and the guests should be maintained along the customer journey- before, during and after the stay.

Sixthly, findings about brand authenticity reveal that, for managers, the dimensions associated with an authentic hotel are: uniqueness, genuineness, reflecting the brand values, delivering the brand promise, integration in local environment and local culture, link to heritage and, in some cases, a link to the essence (back to basics). Moreover, consistency among all aspects is also considered a requirement of authenticity. This characteristic comes out as a transversal element because consistency in the different parts of the experience, throughout the time, in all the brand touchpoints is also perceived by practitioners as a sign of authenticity.

Finally, managers perceive the human interactions between the customers and the hotel staff as a key element, not only to deliver the desired experiences and to ensure customer engagement, but also to convey a perception of authenticity. In fact, the role of hotel employees (human element) as an important vehicle of authenticity is also recognized by guests in Study five. Other elements (atmospherics) like Food & Beverages, design, decoration, amenities, architecture, perfume and music are also recognized as an important vehicle to convey an authentic experience. Findings emerging from Study five, analyzing guests´ perspectives, corroborate these conclusions as atmospheric elements are also recognized by customers as important cues to convey the upscale hotel experience. Concerning the stimuli that guests consider relevant cues for authenticity, Food & Beverages and the hotel architecture emerge, spontaneously, from the focus groups.

Research question iv: *"Can brand experience be a driver of brand authenticity and customer engagement?"*

Research question v: *"Can brand authenticity perceptions be a driver of customer engagement?"*

Research question vi: ***"Can authentic pride and behavioral intentions (brand loyalty) be outcomes of brand authenticity and customer engagement?"***

Study three- Managers´ perspectives, based on in-depth interviews (chapter 5 of this thesis), Study four- Customers´ perspectives, based on a questionnaire (chapter 6 of this thesis) and Study five- Customers´ perspectives, based on focus groups (chapter 7 of this thesis) contribute to answer the fourth, fifth and sixth research questions. Study four, by applying a quantitative approach, directly addresses these questions and Study three and Study five, using a qualitative methodology, help to understand the relationships and enlighten Study four´s results. The cross-check of the results emerging from the different studies enables data triangulation.

Firstly, from the managers´ point of view (Study three) the experience arises as the first to occur, leading to customer engagement. Secondly, in Study four, the proposed hypotheses are supported indicating that a positive experience with the hotel brand influences the customers´ perception of authenticity about the hotel, and also their engagement with the hotel. Moreover, the more authentic the hotel is perceived, the more engaged the customers tend to be with the hotel. Another important conclusion is that a customer who perceives an upscale hotel as being genuine and original, tends to recommend the hotel, return and spread a positive word-of-mouth (WOM). Furthermore, he/she also tends to have a greater feeling of self-worth. Finally, an engaged customer is also more likely to be loyal to the hotel and feel an authentic pride while staying at the hotel. Insights arising from Study three are in line with these conclusions as managers identify behavioral outcomes (recommendation, positive WOM, return/ repurchase and guests becoming brand ambassadors) as the most desired consequences of brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity. However, findings raise the discussion about a possible overlap between the behavioral component of engagement and the loyalty concept, depending on the perceived scope of engagement.

Thirdly, taking into account the indirect effects analyzed in Study four, the role of customer engagement and brand authenticity as mediating variables is proven, that is the relationship between brand experience and authentic pride and brand experience and behavioral intentions (loyalty) can be mediated by customer engagement and also by brand authenticity. However, the strength of the relationships seems to indicate that customer engagement is a stronger mediator, in the mentioned relationships, than brand authenticity. Insights from Study five are in line with these conclusions as guests, in the focus groups, spontaneously describe the relationship among brand experience, customer engagement and brand loyalty (recommend and willingness to return). In fact, guests recognize that a very good, memorable and unique

experience is a required element for customers to create a bond with the hotel, which means that the guests will tend to think more often about the hotel and, consequently, recommend it and return. Other relationships arise from Study four, namely, the relationship between brand authenticity, customer engagement and brand loyalty.

Fourthly, in Study four, all the dimensions of brand experience are found to be significant in the formation of brand experience itself. Affective (β=0.359), sensory (β=0.332) and intellectual (β=0.341) dimensions emerge as the most relevant. In Study three, most of the interviewees recognized the sensorial (sensory) and emotional (affective) dimensions of experience as the most important, in an upscale hotel context. In Study five, the sensorial (sensory) dimension emerges as the most important, followed by the emotional (affective) dimension.

Fifthly, concerning the dimensions of customer engagement, we conclude that all of them are significant. Yet, absorption (β=0.311), attention (β=0.295) and enthusiasm (β=0.291) emerge as the most relevant in shaping the overall engagement concept. Insights from Study three and Study five reveal that managers and guests consider the emotional characteristics of engagement as the most important for an upscale hotel. This emotional dimension is directly related with the enthusiasm dimension analyzed in Study four.

Sixthly, regarding brand authenticity, from Study four, we realize that genuineness (β=0.693) and originality (β=0.408) are important dimensions of the construct. The relevance of these dimensions has also been acknowledged by the interviewees in Study three and by guests in Study five. However, other dimensions, are also associated with an authentic hotel in Studies three and five, namely, the integration in local environment and local culture, delivering the brand promise and consistency among all aspects of the service experience.

Research question vii: *"How can the analyzed constructs (brand experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity) be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation? Will they be relevant after COVID-19 pandemic situation?"*

Study three- Managers´ perspectives, based on in-depth interviews (chapter 5 of this thesis) and Study five- Customers´ perspectives, based on focus groups (chapter 7 of this thesis) address directly the seventh research question.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation has had a strong impact on tourism and hospitality sectors. From the managers´ point of view, it has led to new characteristics of traveling and stays, in the short term. Shorter vacations, closer destinations, destinations with low population

density and the quest for nature destinations are referred as actual trends. Within the upscale hotel context, the role of the human element, together with the integration of technology are expected to continue after COVID-19 pandemic. However, findings suggest that the need to travel is expected to continue or to even grow in the future, although hotels need to have financial resilience to survive the crisis. Safety and security procedures implemented by these hotels, together with the vaccine and the trust on the brand, are believed to ensure guests´ confidence in upscale hotels.

Guests, in Study five, recognize that, due to Covid-19 pandemic situation, hotels now have new requirements. As in Study three, the safety and security procedures (eg., the use of face masks, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, rooms cleaning) that have been implemented by hotels in general, stand out to ensure customers´ confidence in the hotel brand. Moreover, the existence of a safety and security certification is also referred by guests as an element that increases customers´ confidence on the hotel brand. However, the expectation is that high-end hotels would have all these procedures implemented and that they would be a safer choice compared to other not so premium alternatives. Other characteristics like the possibility to be more isolated in the hotel, smaller hotels or hotels that have big exterior spaces also seem to be preferred. Different attitudes towards the possibility of travelling again and returning to a hotel, can be pointed out. There are guests who would like to travel again, as soon as the restrictions disappear and others who say that, in order to travel again and to feel comfortable in a hotel, they would check if the safety and security procedures are being implemented. Finally, there is also a more conservative position- not planning to travel in the near future. Customers also suggested that age can play an important role as older guests can be more reluctant to travel and return to hotels in the short term.

Managers (Study three) and guests (Study five) agree that Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity will still be relevant in a Post-COVID-19 phase and managers add that, in their opinion, the relevance of these concepts is even expected to grow in the upscale hotels context, after COVID-19.

8.2 Contributions

8.2.1 Theoretical contributions

This thesis contributes for both theory and practice. As for theoretical contributions, the two systematic reviews performed map the past, structuring the existing knowledge about customer

engagement and brand authenticity and shed light on what could be future research in these fields of knowledge.

Results emerging from Study three, Study four and Study five contribute to a deeper and more holistic understanding of how brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement are perceived and applied, in the hotel context. Specifically, the studies contribute for a better understanding about the relevance of the constructs, their meaning, their dimensions and the elements that are key to deliver the upscale hotel experience and to convey a perception of authenticity. Specific topics, directly related to each construct are also explored. For instance, the specific characteristics of the experience in an upscale hotel, the specific role of the hotel as an "experience provider", the engagement mechanisms of upscale hotels and the main challenges faced by hotels while conveying authenticity. In fact, an important theoretical contribution is made because, in this thesis, the constructs were not only analyzed, but also compared from the perspective of managers and customers, enabling an integrated view of the phenomena.

Another important theoretical contribution is related to the relationships among the different variables. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that the model used in Study four is studied and empirically tested, in an upscale hotel context. Concerning the relationships among constructs, on the one hand, this study´s findings reinforce the results of previous studies, empirically testing established relationships, in the specific context of upscale hotels. On the other hand, relationships that haven´t been deeply explored in previous research are addressed in this study.

Finally, this thesis also contributes to shed light on how the hotel experience, customer engagement and brand authenticity perceptions are being impacted by the COVID-19 situation and gives some insights about the relevance of the concepts in a Post-COVID-19 phase.

8.2.2 Managerial contributions

This thesis is also useful for practitioners. Concerning managerial implications, the findings emerging from the different studies included in this thesis will help marketers to understand the major links between the concepts under study and their antecedents and outcomes. This will enable marketers and managers, in general, to develop strategies to achieve specific outcomes related to engagement and authenticity perceptions. Marketers will also benefit from being aware of the existence of scales to measure customer engagement and brand authenticity and eventually apply them in their surveys. Moreover, being aware of the different dimensions

involved in customer engagement and brand authenticity is useful as managers can adapt their strategies and develop operational tactics to address specific dimensions that are more relevant for their brands.

Specifically, taking into account the different dimensions of experience, practical contributions can be made. In fact, managers can work on the sensory, affective, and intellectual aspects as they are the ones that seem to contribute the most to the formation of the brand experience construct, in an upscale hotel setting. For instance, developing atmospheric cues (e.g., decoration, facilities and amenities, design, architecture, Food & Beverages, light, scent) in a holistic and coherent way, so that these stimuli deliver a coherent message along the customer journey that is unique, memorable and in line with the brand positioning. Moreover, working on the affective dimension of the experience is also important as it stands out as a very important aspect of the upscale hotel experience. Findings point out that the attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees towards guests are critical to create and maintain the affective dimension of experience. For that to happen, employees´ recruitment process, training and daily living the mission and the vision of the brand are essential. Finally, the intellectual dimension of the experience can be stimulated by the hotel as it can play a role to increase customers´ knowledge. For instance, by helping guests to increase their knowledge about the destination (region, country) or about the hotel itself or by teaching them how to perform a specific activity displayed inside the hotel or in the region. This means that hotels can move from merely experience providers to knowledge enablers.

Being aware of the different dimensions of authenticity, in this specific setting, will also help managers, as they will be able to develop strategies to address these dimensions. For instance, to build on the unique aspects of the hotel brand (originality dimension) and ensure that what is communicated to customers in all the brand touchpoints is, in fact, what is delivered (genuineness). This is relevant because originality and genuineness emerge as two important dimensions of the brand authenticity construct. Moreover, as integration in local environment and local culture has also been recognized as a very important dimension of authenticity, managers can develop strategies including atmospheric cues (e.g., decoration, architecture, perfume, amenities, or Food & Beverages) that are in line with the hotel brand positioning and also with the region where the hotel is integrated.

Practical contributions can also be made concerning the creation and maintenance of relationships between the firm/ brand and the customers. Concerning the dimensions of customer engagement, managers can explore the absorption, attention and enthusiasm dimensions of customer engagement. Firstly, by creating unique and memorable experiences

during the stay at the hotel, customers will tend to be absorbed by the experience. Secondly, concerning the emotional (enthusiasm) dimension of engagement, focusing on creating unique and memorable experiences, on a personalized service and, sometimes, even a surprising service can help to stimulate this emotional characteristic of engagement. Thirdly, the attention dimension is stimulated mainly through the cognitive aspect of the relationship. For this, offline and online mechanisms, such as e-mails, newsletters and social media are important vehicles to spread hotel news and inform customers about what is happening in the hotel, not only during the stay, but also after the stay. However, as stated by the interviewees in Study three, it is important to know the customers and understand how each customer would like to engage with the hotel as this relationship cannot be standardized.

Finally, it is also useful for managers to be aware of customers´ perceptions about how COVID-19 has impacted their willingness to travel and to stay in this type of hotels. Moreover, knowing what customers expect from hotels, specifically high-end hotels, in this COVID-19 context and in a Post-COVID-19 phase, can also help managers to adapt their strategies and tactics.

8.3 Limitations and future research

This thesis, as any other research, has limitations that can present paths for future research. Firstly, the systematic reviews performed in this thesis (Study one and Study two) have limitations, many of which are related to the review approach employed. Although the review protocol was created and clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined, as well as quality criteria, there is always a certain degree of subjectivity while choosing the relevant studies to be included in the analysis, which could lead to some studies being left out. Moreover, while the databases chosen have a wide coverage of the articles published on the topics, there is always the possibility that some relevant studies can be omitted. However, the reference check was performed to reduce this risk. The high number of articles included in the reviews increases the probability of human error while performing the analysis. Nevertheless, we consider that the inclusion of all these relevant articles in the review will enable a deeper understanding of customer engagement and brand authenticity.

Emerging from Study one and Study two, future paths of research have been identified. Concerning customer engagement, we highlight major gaps for future research: i) explore customer engagement in different industries, ii) undertake a longitudinal approach, iii) perform a cross-cultural analysis, iv) further research about engagement valence and actor engagement,

v) explore customer engagement and customer engagement behaviours in the hospitality setting, vi) perform deeper research about the relationship of customer engagement and other related constructs and vii) explore engagement-facilitating technology. For brand authenticity, the literature review performed also reveals several research gaps where future research could focus on: i) continue to study the authenticity construct due to its relevance and the stage of knowledge; ii) perform deeper research about the relationship of brand authenticity and other related constructs (antecedents or consequences); iii) undertake a cross-cultural analysis; iv) explore authenticity/ brand authenticity in different industries (product categories), v) undertake a longitudinal approach, and vi) identify consumers´ characteristics that may influence the perception of brand authenticity.

This thesis has other limitations. For instance, in Study four, data were collected based on convenience sampling. Moreover, although the conceptual model, tested in Study four, has antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity and customer engagement, the values of R^2 and Q^2 of brand authenticity indicate that future studies may include other exogenous variables and increase the predictive power and the predictive relevance of the model. Regarding the scales used, the one employed to measure brand authenticity was adapted from Akbar and Wymer (2017), thus, the brand authenticity dimensions that were quantitatively studied were those included in this specific scale. However, as other relevant dimensions associated with the construct emerge from Study three and Study five, other brand authenticity scales could be applied in future studies. Finally, although control variables (gender and age) have been introduced in the model tested in Study four, other variables could also be integrated and analyzed, such as cultural differences, type of destination, travel motivation, customers´ personality traits and even other constructs (e.g., brand coolness).

Additional limitations can also be highlighted. In what concerns to managers´ perspectives, it is expected that their opinions and perceptions (Study three) are based on their professional experience which can, somehow, be influenced by the hospitality characteristics of the countries where they have worked, namely, Portugal. However, this is somehow overpassed because the majority of respondents have a vast experience and knowledge of the field, as well as an international perspective. Moreover, during the interviews, different examples of upscale hotels, in different geographies, have been given by the interviewees to explain their point of view. Although a sense of data saturation has been achieved, using a larger sample of interviewees could be beneficial, especially if hospitality experts from other segments (eg., economy chains) are included, to contrast the opinions.

Regarding the focus groups performed with guests, we should also recognize that there are limitations associated with this specific method. For instance, while running a focus group, it is possible that one person´s opinion influences the rest of the group and the moderator needs to be aware of this risk.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the interviews and the focus groups ran during an extraordinary time- COVID-19 pandemic situation- that has strongly impacted the sector under study, as well as customers´ lives in general. Therefore, the opinions and perceptions conveyed are also influenced by this circumstance. It is likely that as the global health situation evolves, managers´ and customers´ opinions evolve, especially concerning the topic of the impact of COVID-19 on travelling and on the hotel experience.

Based on the identified limitations, future studies may:

- Replicate the proposed conceptual model tested in Study four, using a more representative sample and also include other exogenous variables, for instance, atmospheric cues (indexical and iconic) to be tested as an antecedent of brand authenticity.

- Develop an integrated scale of brand authenticity exploring the dimensions of originality, genuineness, reliability, continuity and integration in local environment and local culture to be empirically applied to the hotel setting. As some dimensions of brand authenticity, emerging from Study three and Study five have not been deeply explored in the literature, namely the integration in local environment and local culture, it would be relevant to develop an integrated scale that also incorporates these findings.

- Introduce other variables in the conceptual model tested in Study four. For instance, cultural differences, type of destination (e.g., developed vs. emerging destination markets), travel motivation (leisure vs. business), customers´ personality traits and other constructs (e.g., brand coolness) could also be tested as moderator variables.

- Test if the relationships established in this thesis would sustain for an economy hotel.

- Deeply study topics that emerge as more controversial issues from Study three and Study five. Specifically, the dichotomy authenticity and link to the past (heritage) and also the scope of the behavioral dimension of engagement. From study three, we realize that, for some interviewees, authenticity should be linked to the past, to tradition, to heritage and, for others, this characteristic is not a requirement of authenticity. Moreover, from the managers´ perspective, there seems to be an apparent

overlap between the behavioral dimension of engagement and the loyalty construct. We call for further research on this topic as it would help scholars and managers to understand if loyalty components (return/ repurchase, WOM, recommendations) should be considered under the scope of this behavioral component, transforming engagement in the ultimate goal of many relationships established between the firms/ brands and the customers, instead of loyalty.

- Analyze the role of the brand experience, brand authenticity and customer engagement dimensions in other upscale and luxury services to understand it the dimensions´ relevance would sustain across different industries.

In the end, we are confident that we answered the research questions that triggered this thesis, thus contributing to increase knowledge both in the academic and managerial fields. We hope future research can be built on this work to continue the process of understanding the experience, the engagement and the authenticity perceptions in the marketing field.

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Annex A- Interview guide

- Introduction (explanation of the study by the interviewer- objectives, nature, context and about how the information collected would be used)
- Brand Experience
    - o In your opinion, how important is the guest experience in a hotel? Why?
    - o What kind of experience should an upscale hotel provide to its guests?
    - o What kind of stimuli (elements) do you consider important to provide the required experience to guests?
- Customer Engagement
    - o Do you consider important to keep a strong interaction and relationship with hotel guests?
    - o Should this interaction be kept with all the guests or with only a specific segment?
    - o What are the main mechanisms to establish and maintain an engaged customer?
    - o How do you know if the guest is really engaged with the hotel?
- Brand Authenticity
    - o Nowadays, several brands state that they are authentic. Do you think this concept of Authenticity can be applied to hospitality in general and to upscale hotels in particular? How?
    - o What is an authentic hotel?
    - o Do you think that a hotel should be authentic? Why?
    - o Do guests value that? Why?
    - o What kind of stimuli, from the internal and external environment of the hotel, do you consider to be relevant cues for authenticity?
- Relationship among the concepts
    - o In the context of an upscale hotel, how do you think the concepts of Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Customer Authenticity relate to each other?
- Main outcomes
    - o What do you consider to be the main outcomes when an upscale hotel is able to provide a memorable experience, is perceived as being authentic and is able to create a relationship with its guests?
- COVID-19 and post-COVID-19
    - o How do you imagine Tourism and, in concrete, Hospitality after COVID-19?
    - o During this pandemic period, what do you consider to be the main factors that would make guests feel confident when they return to a hotel?
    - o Do you think that Brand Experience, Customer Engagement and Brand Authenticity will continue to be relevant post-COVID-19?

Annex B- Questionnaire

Questionnaire
Guests´ perceptions about hotel experiences

This survey is part of a research project and its aim is to better understand guests´ perceptions about their last stay in an "upscale"[1] hotel. Your participation will help us to gain a better understanding of guests´ experiences and opinions while staying in this type of hotels.

This study will respect all the requirements of an ethical research project, ensuring the anonymity of the data obtained. Data collection and processing will be solely the care of the research team. The results will only be used for academic and scientific purposes.

Please bear in mind that there are no right or wrong answers and that your participation is volunteer. The survey will take you around 15 minutes to fill out.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in this work. Your participation is essential!

[1]An "upscale" hotel can be described as a 4 or 5-star hotel which is characterized by a superior service and an excellent architecture, landscaping and interior design, providing gourmet dining, 24h room service, Internet access and other services.

1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?
   ☐ Yes   ☐ No **(If your answer is No, we thank you for your participation. You have concluded the questionnaire)**.

2. Have you stayed (at least one night) in an "upscale" hotel in the last 12 months?
   ☐ Yes   ☐ No **(If your answer is No, we thank you for your participation. You have concluded the questionnaire)**.

3. Please write the name of the "upscale" hotel where you have most recently stayed.

   _____

Please bear in mind that the following questions refer to your perceptions about the hotel that you have indicated in Q3 (Question 3) of this questionnaire.

4. The following statements are related to **your experience** in the hotel referred in Q3. Please rate each item, using a 7-point scale.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
This hotel makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses.							
I find this hotel interesting in a sensory way.							
This hotel appeals to my senses.							
This hotel induces feelings and sentiments.							
I have strong emotions for this hotel.							

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
Staying in this hotel, engages me in a lot of thinking.							
Staying in this hotel stimulates me to engage in physical actions/ activities.							
This hotel results in bodily experiences.							
This hotel is action oriented.							
This hotel is an emotional hotel.							
This hotel makes me think.							
This hotel stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.							

5. The following statements describe the **way you feel, behave and think** about the hotel referred in Q3. Please rate each item, using a 7-point scale.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
When someone criticizes this hotel, it feels like a personal insult.							
When I talk about this hotel, I usually say "we" rather than "they".							
This hotel's successes are my successes.							
When someone praises this hotel, it feels like a personal compliment.							
I am heavily into this hotel.							
I am passionate about this hotel.							
I am enthusiastic about this hotel.							
I feel excited about this hotel.							
I love this hotel.							
I like to learn more about this hotel.							
I pay a lot of attention to anything about this hotel.							
Anything related to this hotel grabs my attention.							
I concentrate a lot on this hotel.							
I like learning more about this hotel.							

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
When I stayed at this hotel, I forgot everything else around me.							
Time flew by when I stayed at this hotel.							
When I stayed at this hotel, I got carried away.							
When I stayed at this hotel, it was difficult to detach myself from it.							
During my stay at this hotel, I was immersed.							
When I stayed at this hotel, I felt happy.							
In general, I like to get involved in the hotel brand community discussions.							
I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the brand community of this hotel.							
I am someone who likes actively participating in the hotel brand community discussions.							
In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people in the brand community of this hotel.							
I often participate in activities of the brand community of this hotel.							

6. For each statement, make a circle around the number that best describes **your opinion** about the hotel referred in Q3.

This hotel is…
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
A Follower   A Pioneer

This hotel is…
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Ordinary   Innovative

This hotel is…
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Copied   Unique

This hotel is…
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Pretentious   Unpretentious

This hotel is…

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Insincere   Sincere

This hotel is…

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Fake   Real

This hotel is…

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Dishonest   Honest

This hotel is…

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Disguised   Undisguised

This hotel is…

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Illegitimate   Legitimate
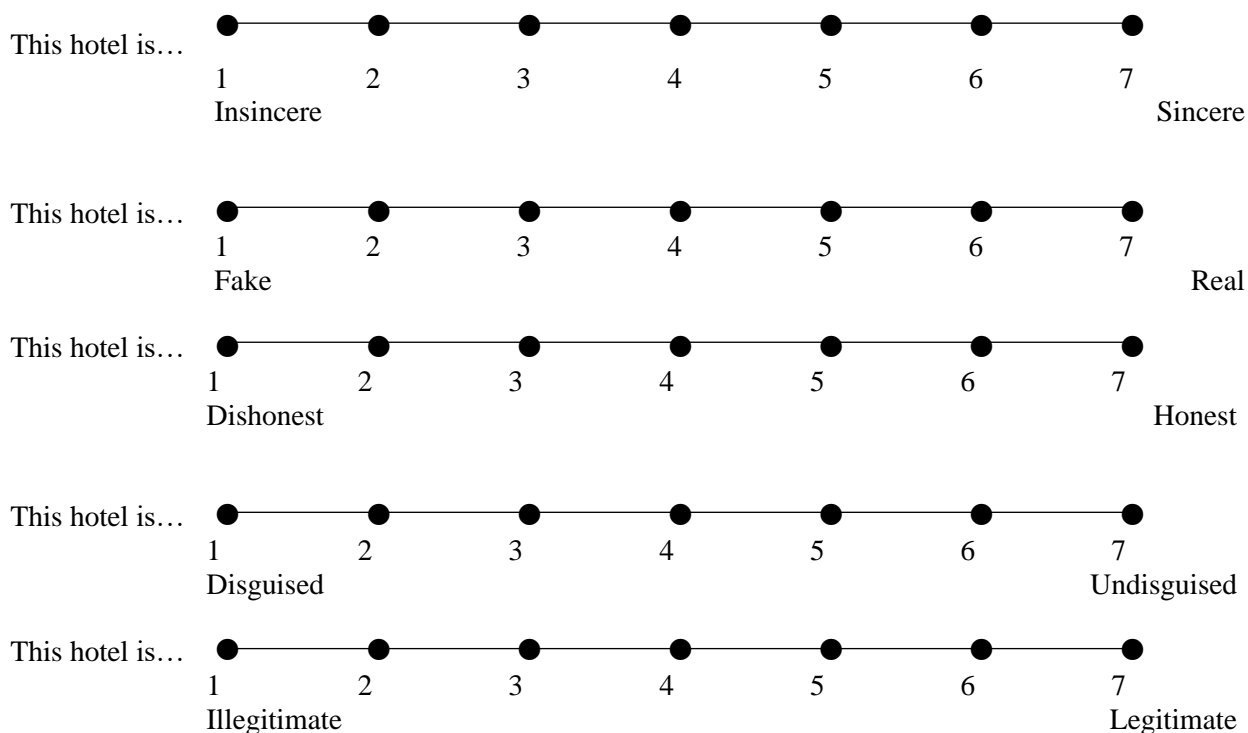
7. The following statements reflect **your feelings** while staying at the hotel referred in Q3. Please rate each item, using a 7-point scale.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
During the stay, I felt accomplished.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt successful.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt that I achieved my goal.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt fulfilled.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt useful and worthy.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt confident.							
While staying at the hotel, I felt productive.							

8. The following statements describe **what you plan to do after staying** at the hotel referred in Q3. Please rate each item, using a 7-point scale.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I will speak well about this hotel to other people.							

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I will recommend this hotel if someone asks for my advice.							
I will encourage my friends and relatives to stay in this hotel.							
In future vacations/ business trips I intend to return to this hotel.							

Please fill out the following information:
9. **Gender**

Male ☐   Female ☐

10. **Age**
    _____

11. Highest level of **education**

Less than High School ☐
Completed High School ☐
Bachelor´s degree ☐
Master´s degree ☐
Post-graduate studies ☐
PhD ☐
Other (please specify) _____

12. **Employment status**

Full-time employee ☐
Part-time employee ☐
Entrepreneur/Businessperson ☐
Pensioner ☐
Student ☐
Unemployed ☐
Other (please specify) _____

You have completed the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Annex C- Topics guide (Focus Groups)

- Introduction (explanation of the study by the moderator- objectives, nature, context and about how the information collected will be used)
- Brand Experience
    - What do you look for when you go to an upscale hotel?
    - How do you describe your experience(s) in upscale hotels? What do you remember from your last stay in this type of hotel? How did you feel?
    - What was really important in this/these experience(s)?
    - Is this/these experience(s) in line with what you were expecting?
    - What are the important elements that the hotel needs to have to achieve the expected experience?
- Customer Engagement
    - Moderator introduces the concept of engagement
    - What makes you to engage (interact with the hotel, participate in social media discussions, give suggestions to the hotel, read more about the hotel, recommend it to others…) with a specific hotel, especially, an upscale hotel?
    - What is the kind of activities and behaviours (related to hotels) that you usually have?
- Brand Authenticity
    - What is, in your opinion, an authentic hotel?
    - Is it important for a hotel to be authentic?
    - Can you give examples of authentic hotels?
    - What are the required characteristics for an upscale hotel to be considered authentic? How do we know if a specific hotel is really authentic?
- Relationship among the concepts
    - Are these concepts of experience, authenticity and engagement related somehow?
- Main results
    - What are the main consequences, for a hotel, that is able to create memorable experiences, engage customers and be perceived as authentic?
- COVID-19 and post-COVID-19
    - How do you imagine tourism and hospitality sectors after covid-19?
    - How do you imagine your experience next time you go to an upscale hotel?
    - What do you consider to be the key elements that hotels need to have, especially upscale hotels, for you to be confident to stay in a hotel in your next vacations/ business trips?
    - Will you still look for memorable and authentic experiences and engagement within the "new reality"?

Annex D- Informed Consent Interviews

CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO, ESCLARECIDO E LIVRE PARA PARTICIPAÇÃO EM ESTUDO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

Este estudo enquadra-se no projeto de tese de Doutoramento intitulado "Drivers and outcomes of perceived brand authenticity and customer engagement in the hospitality context", da estudante de Doutoramento em Gestão Filipa Rosado Pinto, e que está a ser realizado no Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. Esta tese de Doutoramento está a ser orientada pela Professora Doutora Sandra Loureiro.

O estudo tem como objetivo perceber a importância da perceção, por parte do consumidor, sobre a autenticidade de uma marca. Nomeadamente, de que a forma é que esta perceção pode influenciar o nível de "engagement" do consumidor com a marca. Para além disso, pretende-se também compreender como é que o nível de "engagement" dos consumidores e a perceção sobre a autenticidade da marca podem influenciar outros indicadores, tais como, a lealdade do consumidor à marca. Outro objetivo adicional é compreender qual a relevância da experiência do consumidor com a marca e de que forma é que esta experiência pode contribuir para a construção de outros indicadores importantes. Este trabalho realiza-se no contexto de hotelaria.

Para a realização deste estudo, iremos recolher dados, com vários interlocutores. Nesse sentido, pedimos a sua participação, dado que é um(a) especialista no setor. Neste caso, a informação a recolher será obtida através de uma entrevista que deverá ser gravada para permitir uma melhor compreensão dos dados.

Os dados recolhidos serão apenas destinados a fins académicos e de investigação e garante-se o anonimato dos mesmos, ou seja, não se incluindo dados de identificação do entrevistado. A informação recolhida a partir das gravações será anonimizada.

A informação recolhida e os resultados deste trabalho poderão ser publicados em revistas científicas, publicações académicas ou noutros trabalhos de investigação, no entanto, não serão incluídos dados que permitam a identificação do entrevistado.

Este trabalho não lhe trará nenhuma despesa e a sua participação é voluntária, podendo retirar-se do estudo em qualquer altura, durante a realização do mesmo.

Annex E- Informed Consent Focus Groups

CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO, ESCLARECIDO E LIVRE PARA PARTICIPAÇÃO EM ESTUDO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

Este estudo enquadra-se no projeto de tese de Doutoramento intitulado "Drivers and outcomes of perceived brand authenticity and customer engagement in the hospitality context", da estudante de Doutoramento em Gestão Filipa Rosado Pinto, e que está a ser realizado no Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. Esta tese de Doutoramento está a ser orientada pela Professora Doutora Sandra Loureiro.

O estudo tem como objetivo perceber a importância da perceção, por parte do consumidor, sobre a autenticidade de uma marca. Nomeadamente, de que a forma é que esta perceção pode influenciar o nível de "engagement" do consumidor com a marca. Para além disso, pretende-se também compreender como é que o nível de "engagement" dos consumidores e a perceção sobre a autenticidade da marca podem influenciar outros indicadores, tais como, a lealdade do consumidor à marca. Outro objetivo adicional é compreender qual a relevância da experiência do consumidor com a marca e de que forma é que esta experiência pode contribuir para a construção de outros indicadores importantes. Este trabalho realiza-se no contexto de hotelaria.

Para a realização deste estudo, iremos recolher dados, com vários interlocutores. Nesse sentido, pedimos a sua participação neste *Focus Group*, dado que é um hóspede do tipo de hotéis em estudo. A reunião será gravada (imagem e voz) para permitir uma melhor compreensão dos dados.

Os dados recolhidos serão apenas destinados a fins académicos e de investigação e garante-se o anonimato dos mesmos, ou seja, não se incluindo dados de identificação do participante. A informação recolhida a partir das gravações será anonimizada.

A informação recolhida e os resultados deste trabalho poderão ser publicados em revistas científicas, publicações académicas ou noutros trabalhos de investigação, no entanto, não serão incluídos dados que permitam a identificação do participante.

Este trabalho não lhe trará nenhuma despesa e a sua participação é voluntária, podendo retirar-se do estudo em qualquer altura, durante a realização do mesmo.

Annex F- Cross-loadings

	Absorption	Affective	Attention	Authentic Pride	Behavioral	Behavioral Intentions (Loyalty)	Enthusiasm	Genuineness	Identification	Intellectual	Interaction	Originality	Sensory
AP1	0.518	0.417	0.406	**0.835**	0.181	0.440	0.419	0.153	0.183	0.372	0.290	0.318	0.277
AP2	0.454	0.407	0.470	**0.878**	0.181	0.432	0.452	0.156	0.310	0.364	0.274	0.330	0.316
AP3	0.472	0.380	0.336	**0.844**	0.206	0.424	0.378	0.321	0.230	0.337	0.237	0.378	0.296
AP4	0.606	0.463	0.391	**0.881**	0.296	0.528	0.505	0.319	0.242	0.352	0.271	0.423	0.301
AP5	0.426	0.445	0.417	**0.857**	0.211	0.378	0.434	0.140	0.318	0.365	0.271	0.371	0.337
AP6	0.445	0.361	0.298	**0.852**	0.223	0.324	0.363	0.183	0.270	0.251	0.272	0.280	0.219
AutGe2	0.220	0.208	0.208	0.264	0.127	0.395	0.295	**0.916**	0.142	0.163	0.041	0.610	0.109
AutGe3	0.205	0.189	0.213	0.251	0.160	0.374	0.320	**0.939**	0.145	0.167	0.092	0.592	0.113
AutGe4	0.161	0.099	0.124	0.198	0.103	0.281	0.208	**0.961**	0.108	0.115	0.079	0.545	0.066
AutGe5	0.210	0.184	0.165	0.251	0.133	0.332	0.253	**0.955**	0.114	0.156	0.047	0.590	0.123
AutGe6	0.170	0.153	0.151	0.208	0.115	0.294	0.252	**0.909**	0.104	0.141	0.086	0.577	0.095
AutOr1	0.360	0.482	0.428	0.380	0.173	0.423	0.440	0.402	0.211	0.355	0.122	**0.841**	0.372
AutOr2	0.351	0.479	0.386	0.351	0.291	0.479	0.435	0.661	0.203	0.388	0.183	**0.909**	0.349
AutOr3	0.410	0.493	0.458	0.369	0.228	0.471	0.463	0.560	0.250	0.396	0.190	**0.903**	0.381
EngAb1	**0.838**	0.437	0.488	0.411	0.269	0.363	0.581	0.071	0.352	0.436	0.401	0.289	0.253
EngAb2	**0.853**	0.470	0.472	0.454	0.319	0.414	0.569	0.163	0.266	0.488	0.353	0.257	0.312
EngAb3	**0.882**	0.582	0.550	0.505	0.228	0.434	0.576	0.158	0.302	0.523	0.339	0.387	0.409
EngAb4	**0.859**	0.497	0.594	0.458	0.197	0.411	0.569	0.197	0.420	0.476	0.434	0.416	0.323
EngAb5	**0.889**	0.569	0.590	0.522	0.272	0.469	0.668	0.214	0.331	0.513	0.348	0.427	0.403
EngAb6	**0.703**	0.488	0.546	0.458	0.268	0.581	0.564	0.246	0.192	0.396	0.229	0.330	0.380
EngAt1	0.586	0.534	**0.849**	0.445	0.204	0.504	0.660	0.182	0.341	0.551	0.434	0.438	0.401
EngAt2	0.585	0.453	**0.927**	0.371	0.159	0.419	0.654	0.152	0.405	0.474	0.538	0.361	0.341
EngAt3	0.586	0.497	**0.923**	0.425	0.213	0.467	0.653	0.176	0.430	0.515	0.571	0.439	0.352
EngAt4	0.520	0.449	**0.923**	0.407	0.198	0.475	0.632	0.157	0.394	0.479	0.577	0.445	0.315
EngAt5	0.543	0.489	**0.920**	0.411	0.105	0.456	0.637	0.170	0.368	0.509	0.437	0.483	0.364
EngEn1	0.529	0.471	0.547	0.409	0.202	0.407	**0.772**	0.259	0.616	0.441	0.445	0.389	0.307
EngEn2	0.602	0.623	0.632	0.432	0.313	0.553	**0.895**	0.224	0.471	0.515	0.432	0.476	0.503
EngEn3	0.561	0.572	0.605	0.365	0.269	0.600	**0.894**	0.228	0.375	0.487	0.316	0.416	0.448
EngEn4	0.664	0.615	0.633	0.469	0.276	0.582	**0.890**	0.254	0.339	0.516	0.348	0.441	0.457
EngEn5	0.655	0.590	0.647	0.475	0.338	0.653	**0.856**	0.258	0.320	0.528	0.409	0.438	0.466
EngId1	0.325	0.319	0.401	0.276	0.105	0.280	0.424	0.069	**0.857**	0.396	0.328	0.218	0.183
EngId2	0.301	0.263	0.343	0.274	0.099	0.222	0.391	0.079	**0.834**	0.337	0.356	0.162	0.171
EngId3	0.326	0.268	0.389	0.209	0.119	0.243	0.421	0.154	**0.871**	0.321	0.374	0.234	0.139
EngId4	0.330	0.242	0.327	0.273	0.088	0.233	0.438	0.145	**0.857**	0.283	0.332	0.236	0.121
EngIn1	0.445	0.304	0.577	0.331	0.167	0.291	0.465	0.070	0.371	0.337	**0.864**	0.198	0.183
EngIn2	0.386	0.208	0.548	0.302	0.134	0.248	0.404	0.025	0.355	0.301	**0.939**	0.160	0.103
EngIn3	0.377	0.209	0.483	0.296	0.158	0.249	0.398	0.070	0.353	0.293	**0.951**	0.149	0.109
EngIn4	0.366	0.161	0.490	0.261	0.107	0.240	0.381	0.058	0.338	0.255	**0.954**	0.148	0.086
EngIn5	0.320	0.232	0.438	0.215	0.112	0.193	0.389	0.117	0.424	0.254	**0.803**	0.201	0.159
ExpAf1	0.545	**0.898**	0.414	0.415	0.260	0.494	0.575	0.168	0.241	0.635	0.172	0.461	0.719
ExpAf2	0.576	**0.909**	0.491	0.510	0.332	0.456	0.606	0.116	0.331	0.643	0.250	0.470	0.591
ExpAf3	0.500	**0.874**	0.522	0.372	0.287	0.509	0.609	0.192	0.287	0.726	0.244	0.531	0.669
ExpBe1	0.201	0.222	0.119	0.207	**0.885**	0.296	0.241	0.063	0.053	0.319	0.091	0.187	0.207
ExpBe2	0.318	0.347	0.161	0.268	**0.889**	0.244	0.305	0.180	0.081	0.319	0.101	0.265	0.236
ExpBe3	0.276	0.294	0.225	0.188	**0.848**	0.256	0.304	0.107	0.179	0.355	0.203	0.241	0.213
ExpIn1	0.490	0.703	0.482	0.334	0.363	0.411	0.484	0.101	0.353	**0.889**	0.280	0.370	0.578
ExpIn2	0.507	0.661	0.496	0.337	0.331	0.441	0.509	0.161	0.340	**0.927**	0.293	0.377	0.499
ExpIn3	0.521	0.643	0.516	0.402	0.322	0.436	0.563	0.167	0.359	**0.870**	0.289	0.408	0.486
ExpSe1	0.389	0.679	0.350	0.301	0.235	0.412	0.472	0.085	0.141	0.545	0.082	0.373	**0.928**
ExpSe2	0.355	0.691	0.380	0.329	0.223	0.435	0.482	0.131	0.203	0.536	0.168	0.404	**0.953**
ExpSe3	0.422	0.723	0.373	0.335	0.253	0.430	0.484	0.091	0.164	0.571	0.151	0.391	**0.950**
Lo1	0.511	0.533	0.467	0.496	0.310	**0.947**	0.631	0.351	0.270	0.463	0.289	0.469	0.441
Lo2	0.475	0.503	0.443	0.462	0.248	**0.956**	0.584	0.355	0.246	0.435	0.247	0.500	0.424
Lo3	0.552	0.539	0.535	0.508	0.307	**0.934**	0.618	0.316	0.297	0.486	0.287	0.500	0.438
Lo4	0.405	0.447	0.451	0.371	0.257	**0.885**	0.587	0.311	0.249	0.395	0.181	0.461	0.370