



Word of mouth and digitalization in small retailers: Tradition, authenticity, and change

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ABSTRACT

Traditional commerce does not have a great variety of products: it has a more leisurely sale and does not develop impulse buying. The most important factor is the direct relationship established between the seller and the customer, facilitating advice and creating a relationship of trust between the two. Traditional retailers nowadays need digitization, without which they cannot compete technologically with large companies, whereas they can compete in quality, authenticity, proximity, and service. For all these reasons, it seems appropriate to investigate the antecedents that may influence consumers' attitudes towards online shopping in traditional retailers. To achieve this objective, a research plan was developed based on a cross-sectional descriptive study using primary data from a questionnaire answered by 4,063 individuals who live in Spain. The result shows that store loyalty and word of mouth (WOM) communications are the main drivers of attitudes to online shopping. As intermediaries, the mediating variables of the quality and image of the store are established. Small stores should focus on authenticity; this is built on the dimensions established by theory: heritage, legitimacy, nostalgia, originality, and social commitment. Authenticity allows these stores to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, the concept of the experiential economy has been defined and used, not only in the consumer goods environment and shops but also in other areas such as tourism, architecture, and even urban planning. Studies began in the 1980s to give importance to the symbolic, emotional, and emotional part of consumer behavior. In the same decade theories were developed that aimed to increase the attention devoted to consumers' experiences and the development of authenticity as a product differentiation strategy. This authenticity sought by consumers is related to the variables that determine the marketing management of the retailers and to attitudes to shopping.

There is a consumer tendency to "back to basics," which has been strengthened by the Covid 19 crisis: the search for the authentic, the true, confidence in the origins of all the products. And greater importance is being attached to the value of experience, slow life, and slow food, concepts that prioritize experience over speed. So, despite the trend towards greater globalization in consumption, counter-trends are emphasizing the original characteristics of products and stores, the

predominance of small businesses, local traders near their customers, the authenticity of products and services (Amin and Robins, 1992; Gilmore and Pine, 2007; (Jun Song et al., 2015); García-Henche et al., 2020).

Specialized commerce can be associated with historical and cultural identity, which links to the search for authentic experiences and brand image by today's consumers and the idea that local commerce is more authentic, human, and real. Thus, many of today's consumers are not numbers representing cash for the proprietor but have become subjects who demand authenticity, novelty, convenience, and creativity in their shopping experience. They also share this experience through social networks, increasing the value and growth of word of mouth (WOM). The study of experiential marketing is new and just recently moved into academic full swing. Experiential marketing consists of an immersion of the consumers directly into the product through the senses. The aim is to trigger feelings, emotions, and thoughts that generate positive experiences related to the authenticity of products, services, and stores and thus to influence new consumers' buying attitudes.

Faced with these new consumer trends, the most innovative retailers

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have begun to conclude that technology is not only an add-on but a fundamental part of the shopping experience, and that it can contribute fundamentally to the design of new shopping experiences that increase consumers' loyalty to their brands (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2019 and 2021). Market transparency, triggered by the communication opportunities provided by the internet such as the viral and bi-directional dissemination of information, reinforces loyalty, store image, and WOM (Eggers et al., 2013; K. Fritz et al., 2017; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2020 and P. 2017).

The present paper helps illustrate this reality of new consumers and new retail values that marketers need to consider when establishing marketing strategies for organizations. To this end, the theoretical framework of this study focuses on the trends towards experiential consumption. The research focuses particularly on the following areas, which have typically been addressed independently in the literature: store authenticity, store image, store loyalty, store quality, attitudes to Online shopping, and WOM. Recent research, however, illuminates connections between these variables that may facilitate the development of sustainable advantages for organizations. This paper aims to build on previous research on authenticity in presenting a model that reflects the relationships between all of the variables mentioned above.

In order to determine the possible structure of the relationships between the variables and the relevance of the relationships between them, a structural equation model is proposed. The main contribution of this paper is, by using this model in the analysis of stores, to assess the degree of importance for store loyalty that must be attached to authenticity. Once the relevance of authenticity for traditional retailers has been determined, the aim is to determine how consumer attitudes toward online shopping can be developed in these stores' customers.

Accordingly, this article is organized as follows. Firstly, a review is presented of the literature on store authenticity, store image, store loyalty, store quality, attitudes towards online shopping, WOM and the connections between these variables. Secondly, the methodology and hypothesis are explained. Next, a precise description of the experimental results is provided. Then a discussion is offered on the results derived from the structural equation model for traditional retailers. The study concludes with an outline of its theoretical and practical implications

and suggestions on possible directions for future research.

2. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

2.1. Research framework

A new theoretical basis for understanding consumer attitudes toward online shopping is thus built, based on the authenticity model and its relation to store loyalty through store quality and store image. The main contribution of this model is the potential benefits for traditional retailers of digitization through WOM. This approach, with the hypotheses explained below, can be seen in the proposed model in Fig. 1.

2.2. Research hypotheses

Store authenticity, store image, store loyalty, store quality, attitudes towards online shopping, and WOM have usually been addressed in the literature either independently or in reviews of the relationship between two or three of them. But recent research has pointed out the existence of connections between these variables that may facilitate the development of sustainable advantages for organizations. In addition, some studies identify a relationship between authenticity and shopping experiences and attitudes. Across several research disciplines, authenticity is primarily understood as a subject-related behavioral attribute (Fritz, K. 2017). From the 1980s onwards, consumer behavior studies have acknowledged the importance of the symbolic and emotional aspects of authenticity. From this decade, too, theories were developed that aimed to explore the involvement of experiences and the development of authenticity as strategies of product differentiation.

For anthropology, authenticity is mainly related to the preservation of cultural norms, beliefs, and values. Handler (1986, p. 2) describes authenticity as a cultural construct of the modern Western world, which stems from the desire for authentic experiences characterized as "unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched, and traditional."

The first studies on authenticity and shopping experience were produced in the late 1980s by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore. They focused their research on authenticity and the experience of buying and

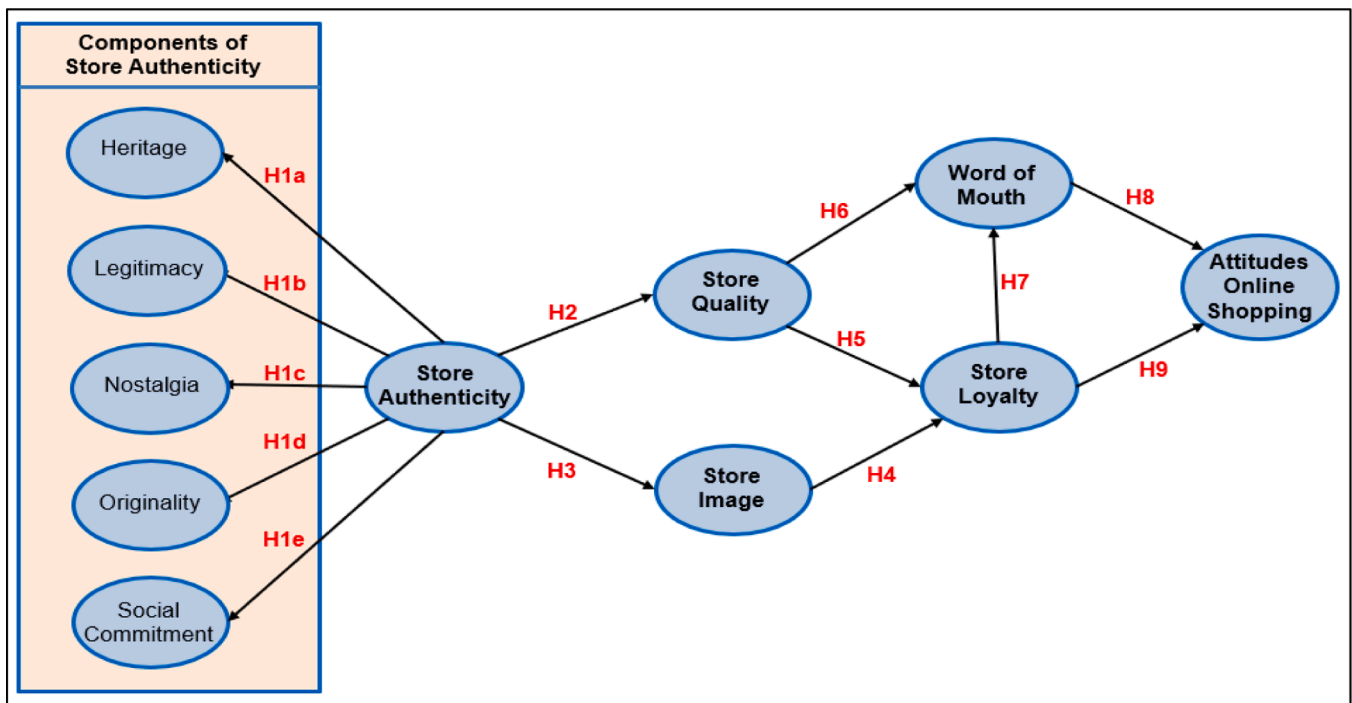


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

consuming as instruments of differentiation of products and services in the market. For Pine and Gilmore (1999 and B.J. 2008), in a world where businesses offer more and more deliberately and sensationally staged experiences, consumers increasingly choose to buy or not buy based on how genuine they perceive an offering to be. The study of experiential marketing is new and has only recently entered the academic mainstream. Experiential marketing consists of an immersion of the consumers directly into the product through the senses, with the aim of triggering feelings, emotions, and thoughts that generate positive experiences related to the authenticity of products or services. Executives must therefore learn to understand, manage, and excel at delivering authenticity (B.J. Pine and Gilmore, 2008).

Consumer demand for authentic brands or stores is steadily rising. With increased pressure to accommodate this demand, researchers and marketers seek to understand how to influence a store's perceived authenticity (K. Fritz et al., 2017; Muñoz et al., 2006). Authenticity is therefore a significant consideration when investigating why consumers have a strong relationship with a particular brand or product (Vandepas, 2003). Within marketing research, two research streams investigating the concept of authenticity have evolved: authenticity as an attribute of a subject (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006) and authenticity as an attribute of an object (i.e., brand authenticity; Beverland, 2006).

The understanding of authenticity is mainly influenced by the conceptualization of Grayson and Martinec (2004). They distinguished between indexical (the 'true' or objectivist perspective) and iconic authenticity (the 'staged' or constructivist perspective). Their framework enhances our knowledge of the process of the formation of authenticity, thus contributing much to our understanding of authenticity within consumer research, as Grayson and Martinec (2004) developed in the field of tourism destinations.

The concept of authenticity having been established, most subsequent studies emphasized the analysis of opportunities of authenticity. Moulard et al. (2016) suggest that a consumer's perception is well-founded if managers follow a product orientation based on prior conceptualizations of authenticity. Along the same lines, K. Fritz et al. (2017) indicated that authenticity could be influenced by certain particular, identified variables (i.e., heritage, nostalgia, commercialization, clarity, social commitment, legitimacy, actual self-congruence, and employee's passion).

Authenticity is important because of its psychological effects, and previous research has shown that perceptions of authenticity have a positive effect on consumer attitudes (Ewing et al., 2012; Spiggle et al., 2012). Authenticity is a subjective construct and is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive that a product's managers are intrinsically motivated: how passionate and devoted they are about their products. Morhart et al. (2015) verified an influencing effect of authenticity on emotional attachment to a product or store. The relevance of authenticity for emotional bonds finds further support within the psychology literature, where authenticity is discussed as a major determinant of relationship well-being and commitment (Wickham, 2013). With regard to the influencing effect of authenticity on emotional reactions, Napoli et al., 2014, assume that the consumer gains direct and indirect consumption value from using the authentic product, brand, or store.

For all these reasons, the most important characteristics of authenticity are originality, responsibility, and 'realness' (i.e., not false, fictitious, reproduced, or copied) (Molleda, 2010; Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). In the discipline of philosophy, authenticity is known as a theme-related behavioral characteristic, closely related to moral behavior, and described as an ethical principle of regeneration and truthfulness, such that it can be appropriately treated as a variable with independent and original character (K. Fritz et al., 2017). In a study of the essence of authenticity, Huaman-Ramirez et al. (2020) claim that heritage has a positive impact on authenticity and on purchasing intentions, Tan et al. (2013) and González (2016), moreover, argue [or show] that authenticity is becoming increasingly important as a challenge for tourist destinations.

Several empirical models have been developed. Morhart et al. (2015) developed a scale for measuring authenticity based on the factors of consistency (i.e., continuity, heritage), honesty (i.e., reliability, quality commitment, credibility), and genuineness (i.e., naturalness, sincerity, integrity). This multidimensional concept was further developed by Fitz (K. 2017), who presented a model in which authenticity is influenced by identified variables and enhances the quality of consumer-brand relationships, which in turn enforce positive behavioral outcomes for consumers. These models study the impact that variables relating to the past have on authenticity and assume that heritage, nostalgia, clarity, social commitment, and legitimacy influence perceptions of authenticity. The results show that some of the variables that influence authenticity are closely connected with the brand's past: that is, heritage and nostalgia (de Beverland et al., 2008; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Morhart et al., 2015; Muñoz et al., 2006). Other important links are with its virtuousness (i.e., commercialization, clarity, and social commitment), with the passion of the brand's or the store's employees, and with the consumers' self-identification with the product or store (i.e., legitimacy, actual self-congruence) as analyzed Beverland and Farely (2010) and Kates (2004).

In summary, authenticity can be defined as the perception of consistency in a product's or a store's core values and norms (Fitz, K. 2017), according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining its essence or substantive nature. This perceptual process involves two types of authenticity: indexical and iconic authenticity.

Based on this review of the literature, this study proposes the first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis H1a (H1a): *Heritage is a significant component of store authenticity.*

Hypothesis H1b (H1b): *Legitimacy is a significant component of store authenticity.*

Hypothesis H1c (H1c): *Nostalgia is a significant component of store authenticity.*

Hypothesis H1d (H1d): *Originality is a significant component of store authenticity.*

Hypothesis H1e (H1e): *Social commitment is a significant component of store authenticity.*

Previous research has highlighted the contribution of authenticity to quality. Another relationship that needs to be analyzed is that between authenticity and quality. Authenticity can be regarded as the quality of the perceived identity with oneself that is subjectively experienced (K. Fritz et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). Some studies focus on food products by analyzing the relationship between food authenticity and perceived quality: in this context, (Vinci et al., 2013) studied the relationship between authenticity and the quality of animal-origin food. Radovic et al. (2001) showed that the perception of authenticity in the honey testing process influences the perceived quality of the product.

Other studies have investigated the contribution of the link between authenticity and quality in the tourism sector. Dominguez-Quintero (2018) concluded that authenticity has a positive effect on the quality of the experience and the satisfaction experienced in a cultural heritage destination. Castéran and Roederer (2013) analyzed the positive relationship between authenticity and destination quality in the Strasbourg Christmas Market. Kong (2010) developed a structural model for quality in cultural heritage tourism based on authenticity, and Hede et al. (2014) investigated the perceived authenticity of the quality of the visitor experience in museums. Finally, Lee et al. (2016) focused on a perceived value approach to authenticity and its influence on satisfaction and quality in heritage tourism in Singapore Chinatown.

Looking at the impact of authenticity on store quality, Gopal (2014) revealed that the sets of store attribute that positively affect the various dimensions of store personality vary between market segments. The study also found that store personality and authenticity positively influenced consumers' store choice behavior and their appreciation of

store quality. Y. Ha and Im (2012) investigated the positive effects of customers' perceptions of the quality of the authenticity of the atmosphere of a restaurant on behavioral intentions. Recent research has indicated the contribution of authenticity to brand or store quality and argued that authenticity positively affects relationship quality, which in turn positively influences consumers' behavioral intentions (K. Fritz et al., 2017). In particular, for consumers, authenticity serves as evidence of quality and differentiation (Eggers et al., 2013; Gilmore and Pine, 2007; K. Fritz et al., 2017). Likewise, Zhang et al. (2019) conducted empirical research on the impact of food tourism authenticity on quality attributes perception and on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. They confirmed that authenticity is vital for consumer perception of quality and for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Zhang et al., 2019, (Haywantee and Muzaffer, 2011)) and should be regarded as an essential condition of a high-quality tourism experience. Tran's study also showed that authenticity positively relates to quality and brand authenticity affects customer satisfaction (Tran et al., 2020).

Zhang et al. (2019) emphasize that authenticity should be an antecedent of quality experience and satisfaction; They propose that authenticity has a positive and direct effect on quality and consumer satisfaction. The central assumption of Zhang's study is that authenticity enhances the quality of the consumer experience. Xie and Peng (2009) and K. Fritz et al. (2017) investigated the effect of the product's perceived authenticity on product relationship quality as an indicator of the strength, depth, and richness of consumer-brand relationships and its indirect impact on behavioral effects, namely purchase intentions. Liu and Jang (2009) discuss the positive effect that authenticity has on satisfaction and quality perception in restaurants and hospitality research, and Lu et al. (2015) showed a positive relationship between perceptions about authenticity and quality in an ethnic restaurant.

Finally, as authenticity is a subjective construct, the evaluation of whether the perception of authenticity requires cognitive effort on the part of the consumer, some studies have examined authenticity involvement as a variable moderating the relationship between authenticity and consumer appreciation of quality (Vanden Bosch et al. 2005, Choi et al., 2015 and K. Fritz et al., 2017).

Based on the research framework, this study developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis H2 (H2): *Store authenticity has a positive influence on store quality.*

In addition to the relationship between authenticity and store quality, it has been pointed out in the literature that the variables authenticity and image are interrelated. Some researchers find evidence of a positive influence of authenticity on the variables related to store image (Marín-García et al., 2020). In particular, Martenson (2007) argues that authenticity is related to image and a favorable image promotes consumer loyalty and positive WOM.

Many conceptualizations of store image have been advanced in the past (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974; James et al., 1976; Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Marks, 1976). The dominant attitudinal perspective adopted in the literature treats store image as the result of a multi-attribute model (Marks, 1976; James et al., 1976). Image is expressed as the complex of a consumer's perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes (Bloemer and De Ruijter, 1998). However, over the years, different authors have identified various store attributes or characteristics that contribute to the overall image of a store (the so-called retail mix). For example, Gil Sasura et al. (2017) asked whether retailers who use different types of innovation, combined with the store authenticity, benefit from a differentiated store image, greater levels of store awareness, and store perceived quality and found evidence of a positive effect of authenticity on store image.

Another way of approaching store image is that of Martineau (1958), who defined store image as the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an array

of psychological attributes. Recent studies have defined store image as "how a given retailer is perceived by consumers" (Berman and Evans 2007). Other researches have described it as the consumers' mental pictures of a store which are linked to an offering (Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Zukin, 2008; Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Dobni and Zinkhan 1990; Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000) and thus to a set of the consumers' perceptions about the store's associations (Loy et al., 2020; K. Fritz et al., 2017; Morschett et al., 2005; Thang and Tan, 2003; Dobni and Zinkhan 1990; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Keller 1993).

More recently, store image has been said to be composed of a range of elements. Fritz et al. study (K. 2017) thought of a retail store's image as part of its personality and authenticity. This implies that authenticity can be regarded as one specific aspect of how consumers view a store's image, and so a highly authentic store could be assumed to have a positive effect on the overall image of a brand or store (K. Fritz et al., 2017).

It has also been shown that perceived authenticity adds value to consumers' store image (Li et al., 2016 and Ramkissoon and Uysal, 2011). Bruhn et al. (2012) and Schallehn et al. (2014) also show that authenticity is not identical to image but that it could be seen as an aspect of store image and thus as containing characteristics that consumers associate with store image. Simply put, authenticity means honesty, and if a store's image includes transparency and integrity, it will be inspired by the best version of authenticity (Bruhn, 2013). Kim et al. (2020) also conducted a study with various implications for the authenticity of restaurants and how it affects their image. They showed that confirmation of a restaurant's authenticity by local people and chain ownership significantly enhances other consumers' perception of its authenticity and image. Consumers' sense of the restaurant's authenticity influences their purchase intention both directly and through their perception of its image and their positive emotions. This study's findings provide traditional restaurateurs with insights into how to enhance perceived authenticity, store image, and purchase intention.

Few current studies analyze the relationship between authenticity and brand image in the retail area. Lew (1989) analyzed authenticity and sense of place in the development of a tourism experience in older retail districts. He found that several cities have decided to protect the authenticity of a district in order to preserve the store image of the shops there. Kent (2007) and Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011) tried to clarify the meaning of authenticity for retail projects located in historic buildings. They found that retailers are concerned with offering emotionally engaging experiences to customers, with the aim of enhancing store loyalty and store image. This study is different from previous studies in that it integrates, on the one hand, the direct relationship between authenticity and store image and, on the other hand, their importance in the retail field.

Given the previous evidence about the relationship between authenticity and the image of the brand or store, or product, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H3 (H3): *Store authenticity has a positive influence on store image.*

A range of studies have assumed that customer store loyalty represents a competitive advantage for the store, which is why store loyalty as a phenomenon is currently receiving a great deal of attention from retail management. Loyalty has been extensively studied, and defined in various ways, but one commonly adopted definition is repeat purchasing frequency or relative volume of same-brand purchasing (Tellis 1988; Oliver 1980 and 1981, Sirgy et al. 1985). Oliver's (1997) definition, widened to include the act of consuming, is that loyalty is a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, or same-store usage, despite situational influences and marketing efforts.

Oliver (1997 and R.L. 1999) argues that consumers can become

'loyal' at each phase of the attitude development structure. Specifically, he suggests that consumers become loyal first cognitively, then affectively, then conatively, and finally behaviorally, the final stage he described as 'action inertia.'

Many conceptualizations of store image and loyalty have been advanced in the past. Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) examined the relationship between store image, store satisfaction, and store loyalty. They found a positive relationship between store satisfaction and store image and between store image and store loyalty. Other studies, too, such as Bloemer's (J. 2003), have analyzed the relationship between store image and store loyalty and found a significant positive relationship.

There has been a long debate in the literature about image and its positive associations with customer behavior and store or brand loyalty (Bansal and Taylor 2015, (Wu and Lin, 2016)6. Some investigations have discovered that image can impact customer positively by enhancing customer satisfaction which, thus, influences customer loyalty (Lai et al., 2009; Calvo and Lang, 2015; Ryu et al., 2012). Naveed et al. (2019) investigated the impact of store image, service quality, and loyalty on customer services purchase intentions. They revealed that both store image and service quality have a significant and positive impact on purchase intentions and store loyalty. Gopal (2014) showed that store image positively influences attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty, and purchase intention in consumers. In the tourism business, the results from Grah and Tominc (2015) confirm a statistically significant relationship between store image, positive affect, and store loyalty in Slovenia. The first and most important conclusion of their research is that the constructs formed—store image, positive affect, store loyalty—are interrelated.

Several studies have concluded that customer store loyalty represents a competitive advantage for the store (Oliver, 1997; Thomas, 2013). Research has proved that loyalty results from the net of relationships among customers' satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the store. Relationships have also been demonstrated among loyalty, store image, and the positive effect of store satisfaction, store trust, and store commitment (Bloemer and De Ruyter, 1998; Bloemer and Odekerken-Schröder, 2002; Koo, D. 2003; Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997; Oliver, 1997; Osman, 1993; Thomas, 2013; Yoo et al., 2000 and Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis H4 (H4): *Store image has a positive influence on store loyalty.*

There has been a long debate in the literature about the relationship between quality, customer satisfaction, and store loyalty, especially related to retail department stores. Many studies have examined whether quality is associated with store loyalty and customer satisfaction, and show that quality has a strong influence on store loyalty (Lee and Allen, C. 1999; Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000 or Yoo et al., 2000).

D. Koo (2003) examined how consumer satisfaction is influenced by various characteristics of the discount retail environment and the overall attitude towards a discount retail store, and how consumer satisfaction, in turn, affects store loyalty. Corstjens and Lal (2000) demonstrated analytically and empirically that premium quality store brands play a role in store loyalty by increasing customers' switching costs between stores. Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003) examined factors that have been shown to influence store attitudes and showed that quality perceptions are related to loyalty

Babakus & Yavas (2008) identified, in a study done on a national retailer, that quality is the second most important antecedent in the formation of store loyalty. Ramana et al. (2011) studied the role of merchandise quality in the formation of store loyalty. They tried to test the inclusion of the quality of merchandise and service, and satisfaction, as the determinants of store loyalty. They found that a combination of

quality merchandise and quality service is found to have a positive effect on store loyalty. One of their findings is that the perceptions of the quality and service provided by the store contribute to store loyalty. The study showed that service quality has more direct influence on loyalty than store satisfaction, and the combination of quality merchandise and quality service has a positive effect on store loyalty.

In 2020 Rokonzaman et al. proposed a theoretical model explaining the roles of multiple mediating quality factors in the association between product involvement and store loyalty. The results indicate that quality is related to store loyalty and works as a serial mediator in the association between store quality and store loyalty.

With all the above studies that explored the relationship between quality and loyalty, the following hypothesis is set:

Hypothesis H5 (H5): *Store quality has a positive influence on store loyalty.*

Whereas store quality has been studied extensively, very little research has examined the relationship between store quality and WOM. Hartline and Jones (1996) concluded that perceived service quality in hotels had a positive influence on WOM intentions. Some authors claim that satisfaction with products, services, quality retailers, and so on is an important post-purchase response often associated with consumer outcomes such as loyalty and retention (Brown et al., 2005; Bolton and Lemon 1999; Oliver 1997; L. Casalo et al., 2008) and, to a lesser extent, positive WOM (Brown et al., 2005).

Most recent studies have focused particularly on online shopping. Carlson and O' Cass (2010) explored the relationships in content-driven e-service websites between e-service quality, satisfaction, attitudes to WOM, and behaviors. They developed a conceptual model to examine these relationships. Their findings suggest that positive evaluations of e-service quality influence positive levels of consumer satisfaction and consumer attitudes to WOM.

Y. Ha and Im (2012) examined the role of website design quality and online store quality in satisfaction and WOM generation. They argued that website design influences consumer's emotional and cognitive responses and contributes to satisfaction and word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in an online shopping context. They concluded that website design quality produced positive direct effects on pleasure, arousal, and perceived information quality, and indirect effects on satisfaction and WOM intention. Konuk (2018) analyzed the role of store image in predicting consumers' purchase intentions and WOM towards organic private label food and concluded that there is a positive relationship between the two variables.

As can be seen from the studies mentioned above, there is little research that relates store quality with WOM. This research proposes and empirically supports the idea that store quality influences consumer attitudes to WOM.

It is therefore expected that store quality has a positive effect on WOM and hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis H6 (H6): *Store quality has a positive influence on word of mouth.*

Continuing with studies that analyze influences on WOM, customer store loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) have traditionally been two main goals of managers and retail marketing research. Both loyalty and positive WOM have been considered to be key factors in achieving company success.

Several authors have proposed that loyalty leads to higher intensity in positive WOM (Hallowell, 1996; Flavián et al., 2006; Keating et al., 2003; (Lynch and Ariely, 2000)). Focusing on the relationships between loyalty and WOM, Bowman and Narayandas (2001) measured WOM via a survey and found that positive WOM increases customer loyalty and consumer loyalty increases positive WOM. Moreover, Casalo et al. (L. 2008) found that greater customer satisfaction is directly and positively

related to loyalty, and this loyalty is positively related to greater levels of positive WOM about a store, website, service, or product.

Other studies, such as Gauri et al., 2008, explore the role of store loyalty in WOM and compare online store ratings such as store loyalty with other determinants of WOM. Gauri's interesting finding is that store loyalty has a positive influence on WOM and is one of the most powerful customer acquisition tools that stores have.

The literature has consistently emphasized the utmost importance of trust and loyalty for survival in the financial sector (Fang et al., 2014; Melnyk and Bijmolt, 2015; 6(Suhail and Mushtaq, 2016)). Focusing on online banking activity, Casaló et al. (L. 2008) study the role of satisfaction and website usability in developing customer loyalty and positive WOM in e-banking services. This research showed that satisfaction with previous interactions with the bank website had a positive effect on both customer loyalty and WOM. In addition, website usability was found to have a positive effect on customer satisfaction, and, as expected, loyalty was also significantly related to positive WOM. Related to e-banking services, Salehnia et al. (2014) presented a model of E-Loyalty and WOM based on e-trust in E-banking services and confirmed that e-loyalty has a positive effect on WOM.

There are also some studies related to the influence of store loyalty on WOM in the retail field. Roy et al. (2014) followed other studies that investigated the antecedents of consumers' positive WOM intentions and behaviors in retail (Anderson and Srinivasan, S. R.E. 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Chiu et al., 2009). Roy et al. (2014) developed and empirically tested a model which examines the relationship between website service dimensions, website quality dimensions, website stickiness, website loyalty, and WOM. The study found that interactivity has a direct effect on stickiness and indirect effects on loyalty and positive WOM in the e-retail context. They also found that website stickiness and website loyalty are two different constructs that form the immediate antecedents of WOM.

Considering these previous studies that relate concepts such as store loyalty and word-of-mouth, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H7 (H7): *Store loyalty has a positive influence on word of mouth.*

Some researchers have pointed out that attitudes towards online shopping and WOM are interrelated. As online shopping has become more active, there has been more discussion about the emotional and psychological value of online shopping.

A range of other studies have found that trust in the information offered, and in the purchasing process, contributes to reinforcing recommendations to others and, therefore, to WOM (Loureiro et al., 2018). Customers rely on personal recommendations of a brand, product, or store made by family or friends, that is, WOM. This concept may be defined as informal communication of opinions between private parties about goods and services (Dichter, 1966). It has been considered one of the most powerful forces in the marketplace (Bansal and Voyer, 2000) created by consumers. The concept of Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) is the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques

Most recent studies have focused on consumer attitudes toward online shopping and their communication through the internet, what is called 'electronic WOM' (eWOM). It is evident that the development of the internet has revolutionized the operational strategies of the retail industry; it has had an impact on all elements in the retail purchase process, providers, distributors, and consumers. WOM communication, which is extremely important in marketing, is now empowered by the thousands of contacts that an active user can generate on the internet via blogs, e-mails, or via Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account (García-Henche, 2018).

Such information communicated through the internet—reviews, tweets, blog posts, "likes," "pins," images, video testimonials (eWOM)—represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary

consumer behavior and attitudes to shopping (Babic, 2016). e-WOM is very important to the visibility of individuals and businesses seeking exposure on the internet: it is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, T. 2003, 2004).

The current customer experience—that takes place in a variety of new contexts, represented by the new channels offered by retailers (referred to as 'omni-channels')—has sparked research interest in the experience lived by customers in both physical and virtual stores (Ribamar et al., 2019). The internet's accessibility, reach, and transparency have empowered marketers interested in influencing and monitoring WOM as never before. The new communication channels generated by the Web 2.0 and 3.0 categories have extended the scope of communications. A unidirectional message has been replaced by a bidirectional one with strong participation by the end-user in its generation and release (García-Henche, 2018). Page content can be developed both by the company itself and by users, bloggers, or Instagrammers, which encourages interaction, participation, the creation of social media or communities, and positive online shopping attitudes (O'Reilly, 2007). On the other hand, Mahajan et al. (1984) focused on new products with positive and negative word-of-mouth.

Several authors (Schmitt, 2013; Bartosiak, 2020; Hayes, 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Xu-Priour, 2014) have consistently argued that consumers place more trust in recommendations from peers than in professionally written content in websites and other online platforms (websites, blogs, social networks, online brand communities). These recommendations have a positive impact on online shopping attitudes.

In return, consumers like to post their own comments, share their experiences and recommend brands to others. They are becoming the voice of the brands. Fashion brands are using online platforms to interact with consumers, create new fashion items and improve the online shopping attitude of their potential consumers (Tynan et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2015)

One element of the literature search conducted for the present work has identified the empirical studies of the effects of WOM on sales. Most studies confirm that what is shared among users generates greater confidence, credibility, and loyalty (Litvin et al., 2008; (Mukerjee and Shaikh, 2019)9, Ayo et al., 2016 and Babic, 2016). Several authors consider that the search of information is an important part of the decision-making process on purchases, which has significantly evolved after the advent of the internet and the ICTs, as they reduce the uncertainty and the perceived risks (Brown et al., 2005; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Mackay and Vogt, 2012). In the context of the use of self-service technologies in emerging markets, several studies have focused on technology adoption, technology anxiety, and influence on customer outcomes (Ayo et al., 2016). Mukerjee and Shaikh (2019) suggested that customers' positive evaluations of perceived usefulness and WOM have a positive effect on their online shopping attitudes.

Consumers' actions on social media are particularly important because they can act as product or service endorsements to other customers, affecting their purchase intentions. Some studies, though, have found that customer experience in physical stores still has more impact on consumer traditional WOM intentions than on eWOM intentions (Ribamar et al., 2019; Pedroni et al., 2014).

Several studies have looked at the differences between WOM and eWOM in the influence they have on buying attitudes. Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi (2016) examined the influence of various sources of negative eWOM and negative traditional WOM on trust in the WOM, on attitudes toward the service provider, and on purchase intentions. They showed that negative traditional WOM is more influential than negative eWOM in the form of written Facebook testimonials, written review site testimonials, and written testimonials on a corporate website. Goodrich and De Mooij (2014) compared the use of social media and other information sources for consumer decision-making across 50 countries. The study presents international differences in consumer usage of social

media and how eWOM influences consumer decision-making. The results indicate that the use of information sources that influence online purchase decisions varies significantly by culture.

Several studies have linked WOM influences to online shopping, specifically in the retail area. Zhang et al. (2019) focused on Chinese online stores, investigating the effect of customer satisfaction on customer WOM behavior and attitudes, and found that WOM is positively correlated with customer online shopping experience. Moreover, Hong et al.'s (H. 2017) empirical study on the impact of online WOM sources on retail sales found that both internal WOM and external WOM have significant impacts on product sales and play an important role in consumers' online purchase decisions. In addition, Babić et al. (2016) analyzed the effect of electronic WOM on retail sales. They demonstrated that consumers use eWOM because it reduces their uncertainty and helps them choose the best offering and that it changes attitudes to online shopping.

Based on these findings about online shopping and word of mouth, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H8 (H8): *Word of mouth has a positive influence on attitudes to online shopping.*

The relations between the variables linked to loyalty and attitudes to online shopping have aroused great interest among researchers, as attitude is believed to have a stronger relationship with loyalty than any other variable. Some studies aim to find empirical evidence about the relation between the behavioral consequences of brand loyalty (Lu et al., 2015) and purchase intention (Fang and Zeng, 2015; Lu et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Morhart et al. (2015) verified a positive relationship between brand loyalty and both positive attitude to shopping and the intention to recommend the brand. Also, brand loyalty was linked with retail brand experiences (Rodrigues and Brandão, 2021) and with a specific store (De Elizagarate, 2011).

Some studies indicate that consumer attitudes toward online shopping are determined by loyalty (Shafiee and Bazargan, 2018; Tankovic and Benazic, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Bilgihan, 2016; Pratminingsih et al., 2013 and Lin and Sun, 2009). Based on the relationship between loyalty and positive attitude to online shopping Van der Heijden (H. 2003) found that store loyalty directly influenced attitudes towards purchasing online. Chao-Ming et al. (2009) investigated customers' loyalty intentions towards online shopping and found that perceived usefulness and satisfaction influenced loyalty intention towards online shopping.

Martenson (2007) argued that a favorable image promotes consumer loyalty and positive WOM and attitude to shopping. Similarly, according to Pratminingsih et al. (2013), satisfaction directly influences e-loyalty and online shopping. For Pratminingsih et al. (2013), and for R.E. Anderson and Srinivasan (2003) in online shopping, e-loyalty is defined as a customer's favorable attitude and commitment towards the online retailer that results in repeat purchase behavior.

Liu (2007) argued that loyalty is associated with favorable attitudes on the part of customers toward an e-commerce website, and that this predisposes the customer to repeat buying behavior. Along similar lines, Flavián et al. (2006) argue that the loyal customer always intends to buy from the website and not switch to another one and Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2015) argue that mobile devices create high expectations for improved communications and competitiveness in the retail sector. Tam (2012) also argued that loyal customers always spread favorable messages about their service provider and recommend new customers to the company. In the tourism sector, according to Cuomo et al. (2021), favorable recommendations are based on positive tourist experiences

Based on the review of the literature on loyalty and online shopping, the following hypothesis arises:

Hypothesis H9 (H9): *Store loyalty has a positive influence on attitudes to online shopping.*

3. Methods

3.1. Survey design

This research is based on a cross-sectional descriptive study. The primary data were taken from a questionnaire answered by a representative sample of the Spanish population aged 16 to 64 from November 2020 to February 2021. During these four months, a total of 4063 valid questionnaires were collected, implying a sampling error of $\pm 1.57\%$ (with a 95.5% confidence interval and $p = q = 0.5$) (see Table 1).

The questionnaire has two sections. The first examines the dimensions analyzed, and in the second, data are collected about the demographic characteristics and behavior of respondents. In the first section, the initial selection of the different items of the constructs of the questionnaire was based on an exhaustive review of the literature. Once the items had been selected, and before the final draft of the questionnaire was produced, prior qualitative research was carried out through a focus group. This focus group comprised three researchers from different universities with expertise in commerce, three merchants, and three regular shoppers. The definitive version of the questionnaire, following the input from this qualitative research, consisted of ten constructors with a total of 42 items (see Table 2).

The scale used for these 42 items was a five-point Likert-type response format, in which respondents could rate the items from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree"). The questionnaire was adapted from the review of the literature that helps to ensure the validity of measurement scales for all constructs: three items for brand heritage (K. Fritz et al., 2017), three for brand legitimacy (Rifon et al., 2004)(Suchman, 1995), four for brand nostalgia (K. Fritz et al. 2017), four for brand originality (Bruhn et al., 2012), three for social commitment (Valentine and Fleischman, 2008), four for store quality ((Dabholkar et al., 1996), Yoo et al., 2000), seven for store image (Yoo et al., 2000), four for store loyalty (Yoo et al., 2000), four for WOM (Babic et al., 2016; Carlson and O' Cass 2010; Brown et al., 2005) and six for attitudes towards online shopping (H. Van der Heijden et al. 2003, 20 (Akroush et al., 2020)) (see Table 3).

The questionnaire was piloted in October 2020 on a representative sample of the Spanish population, made up of 50 people between 16 and 64 years of age, distributed proportionally by age and gender, in the same proportions as the Spanish population. After this process, some typos were corrected, and all questions were validated. The final questionnaire was launched on the main social networks from November 2020 to February 2021 through a discretionary non-probabilistic sampling by quotas by age and gender.

3.2. Sample size and composition

The total sample size was 4063 individuals who represent the Spanish population. Table 4 provides a detailed description of the demographic data of the participants and generally indicates a well-balanced and representative sample in terms of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. The composition of the sample was 43.3% male and 56.7% female. By age group, 9.3% were 16–19 years old, 39.5% were 20–39 years old, 34.3% were 40–54 years old, and 17.0% were 55–64 years old. By educational level, 11.1% had only elementary

Table 1
Technical datasheet.

Universe	Males and females aged 16–64
Geographical scope	Spain
Field work	From November 2020 to February 2021
Sampling	Discretionary non-probabilistic by quotas
Sample	4063 valid surveys
Sample error	± 1.57 with a 95.5% confidence level and $p = q = 0.5$

Table 2
Items by construct.

Construct	Number of items
Heritage	3
Legitimacy	3
Nostalgia	4
Originally	4
Social Commitment	3
Store Quality	4
Store Image	7
Store Loyalty	4
Word of Mouth	4
Attitudes towards online Shopping	6

schooling, 36.9% had completed secondary school, and 52.0% had attended tertiary education. Finally, analyzing the sample by monthly family income: for 8.5% it was below EUR 1000; for 37.0% it was EUR 1000–1999; for 30.5% it was EUR 2000–2999; for 17.4% it was EUR 3000–4999 and for 6.7% over EUR 5000.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Structural equation modeling (SEM) has become a mainstream method in many fields of business research, and PLS (partial least squares)-SEM provides a flexible method in terms of data requirements, model complexity, and relationship specification. PLS-SEM does not require normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2017) and is, therefore, the more appropriate method of SEM for many social science studies, where data are often non-normally distributed. Also, since the primary purpose in theory development is to find relationships, their directions, and strengths, as well as observable measures, PLS-SEM is appropriate (Hair et al., 2017).

The proposed model contains ten different composites (each scale consists of reflective items) and a reflective second-order molecular construct (Chin, 2010). The main reason for selecting this option is that removing items does not affect the content validity, and the items are correlated. In the following paragraphs, the different measures included in the study will be assessed in order to determine the fitness of the model through each step. In recent years, researchers have begun referring to the measurement model assessment step in PLS-SEM as Confirmatory Composite Analysis (CCA) ((Henseler et al., 2014); Schubert et al., 2018). The statistical objective of CCA (like confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)) is confirmation of measurement theory. Then, to achieve measurement confirmation objectives in developing or adapting multi-item measures in PLS-SEM, researchers could use CCA by steps. These steps with reflective measurement models are: significant loadings, indicator reliability, composite reliability, AVE, discriminant validity, nomological validity, and predictive validity (Hair et al., 2020). It should be clarified that for this method of confirming measurement quality in PLS-SEM, Hubona et al. (2021) used two other terms: ‘measurement quality confirmation method’ (MCMQ) and ‘partial least squares confirmatory composite analysis’ (PLS-CCA).

Assessing the indicator loadings and their significance means that loadings should have a value of at least 0.708 and significance for a two-tailed test at the 5% level (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2011). Individual indicator reliability is obtained by squaring outer loadings of reflective composites; it measures the amount of variance shared between the individual indicator variable and its associated composite (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). In this study, all 42 items reach this level of acceptable reliability because their loadings exceed 0.71 and load more highly on their own composite than on others. These results provide strong support for the reliability of the reflective measures (see Table 3). Also, loadings are significant ($p < 0.001$), as estimated in PLS using bootstrapping procedures with 10,000 resamples, a level that produces

Table 3
Scales of the model’s constructors, factor loading, reliability, and validity.

Factor loadings	Sources of adoption	
Heritage RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.92, AVE: 0.86, Composite reliability: 0.94		
This store is a store with tradition	0.91	K. Fritz et al. (2017)
The promises of this store are closely linked to its tradition	0.94	
This store is conscious of tradition	0.93	
Legitimacy RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.88, AVE: 0.81, Composite reliability: 0.93		
This store fits well with my cultural views	0.86	Rifon et al., (2004)
This store is compatible with the values and norms of my community	0.93	Suchman (1995)
This store is consistent with my moral principles	0.90	
Nostalgia RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.90, AVE: 0.78, Composite reliability: 0.93		
I associate this store with experiences from my childhood	0.89	K. Fritz et al. (2017)
I associate this store with experiences from former times	0.90	
The communication style of this store reminds me of the good old days	0.89	
For me, this store is a symbol of my childhood/youth	0.84	
Originality RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.88, AVE: 0.73, Composite reliability: 0.92		
This store is different from all other stores	0.85	Bruhn et al. (2012)
This store stands out from other stores	0.88	
I think this store is unique	0.86	
This store clearly distinguishes itself/ themselves from other stores	0.83	
Social commitment RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.88, AVE: 0.81, Composite reliability: 0.93		
This store assumes social responsibility	0.82	Valentine and Fleischman (2008)
This store invests in the greater community	0.90	
This store is socially engaged	0.81	
Store perceived quality RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.90, AVE: 0.76, Composite reliability: 0.93		
The likely quality of this store is extremely high	0.86	Dabholkar et al. (1996) and Yoo et al. (2000)
This store provides excellent service to its customers	0.90	
This store performs service right the first time	0.89	
This store is known for their excellent service	0.85	
Store image RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.88, AVE: 0.58, Composite reliability: 0.91		
This store has friendly personnel	0.74	Yoo et al. (2000)
This store has extensive assortment	0.75	
This store can easily be reached	0.71	
This store has a nice atmosphere	0.77	
This store has attractive promotions in the store	0.73	
This store provides excellent customer service	0.78	
This store offers value-for-money	0.75	
Store loyalty RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.89, AVE: 0.76, Composite reliability: 0.93		
I consider myself to be loyal to this store	0.86	Yoo et al. (2000)
This store is my first choice for buying their items	0.88	
I will not buy from other stores if I can buy the same item at this store	0.89	
Even when items are available from other stores, I tend to buy from this store	0.88	
Word of mouth (WOM) RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.93, AVE: 0.84, Composite reliability: 0.94		
I often talk my positive experiences about this store to friends	0.89	Babic et al. (2016) Carlson and O’Cass (2010)
I will continue to recommend this store to other people	0.93	Brown et al. (2005)
I encourage friends and relatives to buy in this store	0.93	
I make sure that others know that I rely on this store to purchase products.	0.91	
Attitudes online shopping RVM: Cronbach’s alpha: 0.93, AVE: 0.74, Composite reliability: 0.94		
I would think it would be a good idea if this store sold online	0.82	H. Van der Heijden et al. (2003)
Buying online from this store could be as good as buying in the physical store.	0.85	Akroush et al. (2019)
	0.88	

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

Factor loadings	Sources of adoption
Buying online from this store would be pleasant	
I have a favorable attitude towards purchasing online in this store	0.89
I would have as first option the purchase online of this store	0.86
I would recommend others to buy from this online store	0.87

Note: RVM = Reliability and Validity Measures.

Table 4
Sample information.

Gender	%	Total 4063
Male	43.3	1757
Female	56.7	2306
Age	%	Total 4063
16–19	9.3	378
20–39	39.5	1604
40–54	34.3	1391
55–64	17.0	690
Level of studies	%	Total 4063
Primary education	11.1	301
Secondary education	36.9	728
Higher education	52.0	994
Monthly family income (EUR)	%	Total 4063
Less than 1000	8.5	344
1000–1999	37.0	1502
2000–2999	30.5	1240
3000–4999	17.4	707
5000 or more	6.7	270

acceptable standard error estimates.

Two methods are commonly used to measure the reliability of the composite, Cronbach’s alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). Cronbach Alpha has been criticized because these indicators are not equally reliable: composite reliability (weighted) is more accurate than Cronbach alpha (unweighted) (Hair et al., 2019). Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggest 0.70 as a benchmark for a Cronbach Alpha reasonable reliability, and the CR is suggested 0.80 as a “stricter” reliability measure, applicable in basic research. In this case, while all composites exceed the limit values recommended for both measures, they do not have a value of 0.95 or higher, which indicates that individual items are measuring the same concept and they would be redundant.

Convergent validity can be measured by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). This measures the average variance shared between the composite and its individual indicators. All of the AVE values exceed 0.58 (most of them even exceed 0.73). These are acceptable results because the criterion for AVE is a minimum of 0.5 (50%).

Discriminant validity assessment aims to ensure that a reflective composite (construct) has the strongest relationships with its indicators (Hair et al., 2017) and has become a generally accepted prerequisite for analyzing relationships between latent variables (Hair et al., 2017). Usually, the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion has been used, but (Henseler et al., 2014) propose an alternative approach: the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which detects the lack of discriminant validity in common research situations. If the HTMT value is less than 0.90, discriminant validity between two reflective composites has been established. All HTMT coefficients in the study have a value below 0.9, and the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlation between the composites (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This last result refers to the Fornell-Larcker criterion and suggests that each composite is more strongly related to its own measures than to measures of other composites.

An additional method of assessing composite validity is nomological validity. Cronbach and Meehl (1955) put forward the concept of

nomological validity. According to them, an investigation has nomological validity if there is a correspondence between the theoretical configuration of the data obtained and the theoretical predictions about this configuration. The core of interest is the configuration of relationships and the multivariate configuration of the data. In the present research, the supported relationships were identified theoretically from prior research.

Finally, the predictive validity of the model was also assessed using the PLS predict algorithm developed by Shmueli et al. (2016); this checks whether the antecedent variables predict dependent variables by dividing the dataset into two subsamples. PLSpredict also exhibits Q^2 values, but this index compares the prediction errors of the PLS path model with simple mean predictions. If all the Q^2 values are positive, the prediction error of the PLS-SEM results is smaller than the prediction error of simply using the mean values.

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is defined as the average magnitude of the discrepancies between observed and expected correlations as an absolute measure of (model) fit criterion. It was introduced by Henseler et al. (2014) as a goodness of fit measure for PLS-SEM, but it does not represent a fit measure and should not be used as such. Values below 0.10 can be considered a good fit. A stricter view establishes a value below 0.08 as adequate (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In any case, the result for our model is 0.044, which implies a very good model fit.

4.2. Results of SEM

Store authenticity is evaluated as a reflective second-order molecular construct (Chin, 2010). The above discussion demonstrates that the measurements of the components are of high quality. The loads of the five dimensions are also of interest. As can be observed in Table 3 and Fig. 2, the indicators for store authenticity—heritage (0.740), legitimacy (0.723), nostalgia (0.768), originality (0.798), and social commitment (0.724)—suggest that they are a good reflection of this variable in all the dimensions (see Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis H1 and all the sub-hypothesis are not rejected (Table 5).

Taken together, the hypotheses state that there is a positive relationship between store authenticity and store quality and store image, and it is evident that the relationships are relevant and positive. The values of the influences on store quality (0.57) and store image (0.53) show this clearly. Therefore, hypotheses H2 and H3 are not rejected.

With a coefficient of 0.25, the results suggest that store image influence on store loyalty is weak and positive. Similarly, store quality influence on store loyalty (0.33) and WOM (0.27) are relevant, and, respectively, positive and weak relationships. Therefore, hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 are not rejected.

All store loyalty influences have a positive influence on WOM and attitudes to online shopping. The first single variable, however, shows a strong positive influence on WOM (0.57), whereas the influence on attitudes to online shopping is very weak (0.14). Given these values, hypotheses H7 and H9 are not rejected.

For the hypothesis attempting to discover the relationship between WOM and attitudes to online shopping, it is very clear that the relationship is strong and positive, with a high coefficient (0.37). Therefore, hypothesis H9 is not rejected.

It is interesting to try to determine the total effects between the different variables, especially where the influence is determined indirectly (see Table 6). Among the values, we can highlight the influence of store authenticity on store loyalty (0.32), which is a positive coefficient showing a strong relationship. The same applies to the relationship of this variable with WOM (0.32), also a strong and positive relationship. Store authenticity also seems to have an important influence on WOM (0.32), but in this case the influence of store quality (0.44) and store loyalty (0.50) on WOM stand out. Finally, we must note the total effects of store loyalty (0.32) and WOM (0.37) on online shopping attitudes: in both cases a strong and positive relationship.

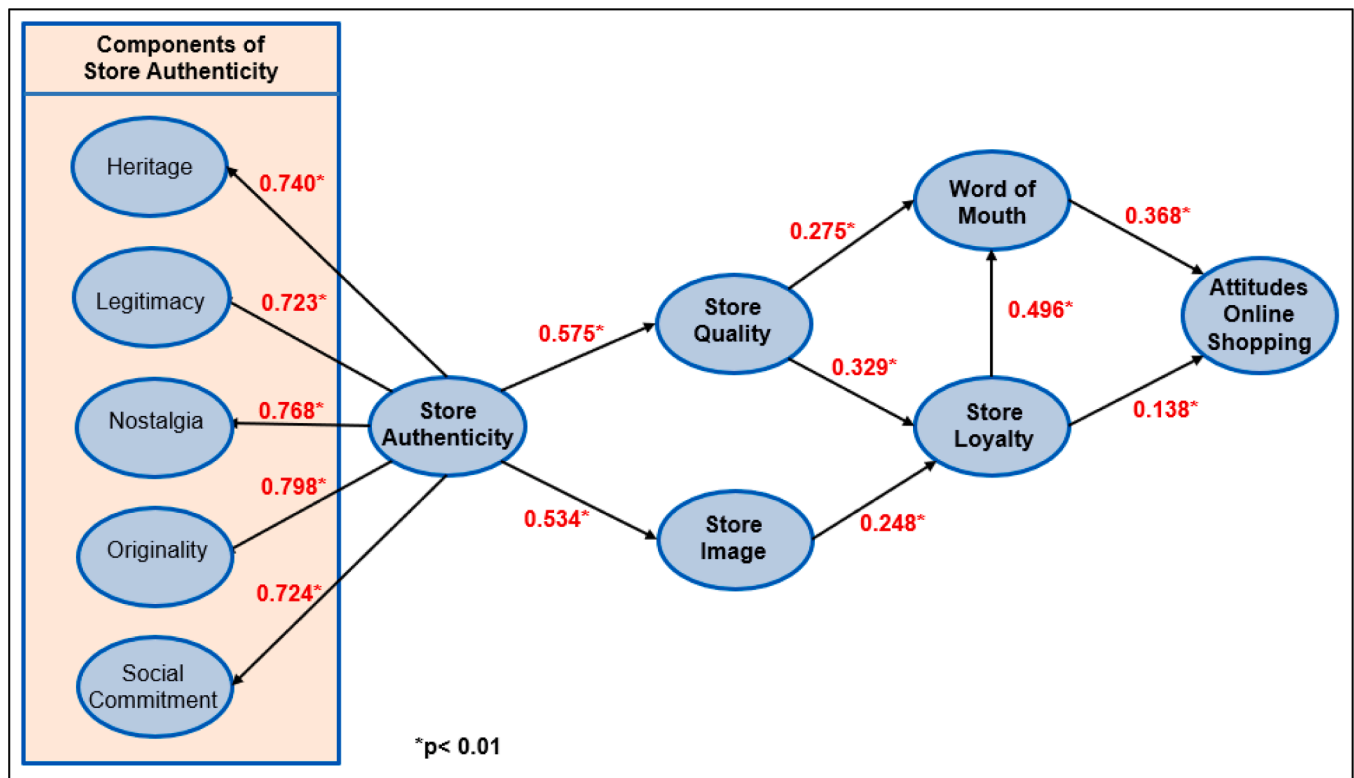


Fig. 2. Conceptual model results.

Table 5
Summary of hypothesis verification.

Hypothesis	Content	Verification
H1a	Heritage is a significant component of store authenticity	Supported
H1b	Legitimacy is a significant component of store authenticity	Supported
H1c	Nostalgia is a significant component of store authenticity	Supported
H1d	Originality is a significant component of store authenticity	Supported
H2	Store authenticity has a positive influence on store quality	Supported
H3	Store authenticity has a positive influence on store image	Supported
H4	Store image has a positive influence on store loyalty	Supported
H5	Store quality has a positive influence on store loyalty	Supported
H6	Store quality has a positive influence on word of mouth	Supported
H7	Store loyalty has a positive influence on word of mouth	Supported
H8	Word of mouth has a positive influence on consumer attitudes towards online shopping	Supported
H9	Store loyalty has a positive influence on consumer attitudes towards online shopping	Supported

Table 6
Total effects.

	Store loyalty	Word of mouth	Attitudes online shopping
Store authenticity	0.32	0.32	0.16
Store image	0.25	0.12	0.08
Store quality	0.33	0.44	0.21
Store loyalty	-	0.50	0.32
Word of mouth	-	-	0.37

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

These results show that all factors of authenticity (heritage, legitimacy, nostalgia, originality, and social commitment) are key factors that add value to a store in the context of traditional retailers and provide a great contribution to both literature and professionals in the sector. This paper is focused on traditional retailers, and one conclusion is that, for these kinds of stores, the relationships between authenticity and its factors do not differ from the results found in the literature on the existence of different factors in its composition (Beverland et al., 2008; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Fritz, K. 2017). The results also confirm the importance of consumer perception as a consistent factor (Mouldard et al., 2016) and verify the influence of emotional and store-linked products (Morhart et al., 2015).

Importantly, authenticity has a strong relationship with store quality and store image. This finding suggests that authenticity plays an important role in most relevant consumer perception variables in those traditional retailers who can offer unique experiences and activities. Previously, the literature had established the relationship between authenticity and store quality (Eggers et al., 2013; Gilmore and Pine, 2007; K. Fritz et al., 2017) and store image (Kim et al., 2020). The explanation for this important positive relationship with both variables lies in the effects of environmental authenticity on consumer behavioral intentions (Ha et al., 2012).

One of the objectives of this paper was to determine whether authenticity is important to traditional retailers. In this case, the relevance of authenticity can be analyzed through its influence on store loyalty through store image and quality (Naveed et al., 2019). As expected, the relationships established with these variables are significant. This is noteworthy since it is not easy to find highly relevant relationships that influence store loyalty or loyalty to the store (Rokonuzzaman et al., 2020; Yoo et al., 2000). With these relationships, it is possible to observe the relevance that authenticity has for traditional retailers in the

management of their stores. The factors that influence authenticity end up developing the level of store loyalty.

Once the importance of authenticity for consumers had been established, it remained to be seen how consumers' online shopping attitudes develop in these stores. Thus, store quality and store loyalty are relevant to, and exert a very important influence on, WOM. In the first case, this relationship is confirmed on the basis of its influence on the emotional and cognitive responses of the consumer, which contribute to perceptions of store quality and, therefore, to WOM communication (Brown et al., 2005; Y. Ha and Im, 2012). On the other hand, it had been claimed that store loyalty has a positive influence on WOM and is one of the most powerful customer acquisition tools that stores have (Gauri et al., 2008). This seems to confirm, as does other research (Salehnia et al., 2014), that this is a very relevant relationship that had been observed both in the retail sector in general and, now, in the traditional retail sector (Roy et al., 2014).

Two factors that particularly affect attitudes to online shopping could lead to more positive behavioral responses to e-commerce. Store loyalty and WOM show positive relationships to attitudes to online shopping (Van der Heijden's, H. 2003). Although WOM has an important relationship with attitudes (Babic, 2016; (Zhang et al., 2019b), store loyalty shows a weak relation with them. But WOM has a partial mediating role between store loyalty and attitudes to online shopping, which means that this kind of loyalty has a strong total effect on online attitudes (Shafiee and Bazargan, 2018; Tankovic and Benazic, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Bilgihan, 2016) in traditional retailers (Liu, 2007).

5.2. Managerial Implications

Accordingly, practitioners should note that customers of traditional stores are searching for authentic, genuine, essential, and traceable products. The relevance of the value of experience—linked with the idea of the 'slow life', valuing experience over speed—is also beginning to be established. On the basis that local commerce is 'authenticity, humanity and real service' which keeps people in their neighborhoods because where there are local stores, there is life. The traditional retailers will not beat the big retailers in technology or price, but they can compete on quality, authenticity, proximity, and service. Under no circumstances should the digitization of the business be outsourced entirely, nor should it be seen as the only way out. If these stores lose their identity, neither their customers' loyalty nor the development of WOM online and offline can make their customers have a positive attitude to digitization. The great contribution of the various factors of authenticity supports the argument that stores should especially attend to aspects such as being a reference against other stores and matching the lifestyle of consumers with high-quality products committed to the neighborhood and society.

This work contributes to the literature on the management of tourism in urban centers and has several implications for entrepreneurs and policy makers. New groups of tourists are looking for unique experiences and authenticity. This makes viable the renaissance of old districts by creating jobs and new business opportunities where neighborhoods or cities managers take advantage of the authenticity of small retail to maintain commercial activity. Good examples are the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, Gracia in Barcelona, Palermo in Buenos Aires, Barrio Italia in Santiago de Chile and Le Marais in Paris.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study suffers from certain limitations. Firstly, the sample was limited to Spanish consumers, and it is difficult to generalize the findings even though the measurement invariance has been raised. Secondly, the survey was focused on people between 16 and 64 years of age and ignored older persons. Thirdly, there is great diversity among the traditional retailers being studied. Future studies should analyze the different influences of authenticity factors and attitudinal antecedents on online shopping for different types of retailers. Additionally, a future

study could attempt to obtain the results for consumers of different ages. It would be interesting to integrate classification variables, in order to enrich the proposed model by using them as variables mediators.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of the capabilities of an extended model of the antecedents of authenticity and of the consequences for consumer response through store quality and store image. Once the importance of authenticity in this type of store is confirmed, it becomes a value for small businesses that must be exploited as a differentiation strategy. Once it is known that consumers are looking for these unique experiences and activities, the variables by which online shopping attitudes (WOM and store loyalty) can be developed can be identified. Of course, this will not allow traditional stores to beat the technology or the prices of large distributors, but they have the advantage of being able to build on hard-to-match shopping experiences with very demanding customers.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Pedro Cuesta-Valiño: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Pablo Gutiérrez-Rodríguez:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Blanca García-Henche:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Supplementary materials

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