

Differences in the city branding of European capitals based on online vs. offline sources of information



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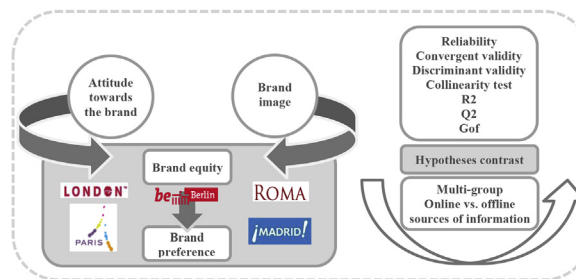
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HIGHLIGHTS

- City branding in five European capitals.
- Differences between offline and online media brand equity.
- Brand equity influences on the preference for a city destination.
- Balance required among traditional and internet tools.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes city branding in five European capitals and compares the brand equity generated through online and offline media. Specifically, this study is intended to fill this gap by proposing a multi-group analysis that presents the differences in brand generation and destination preference. The study focuses on divergences in the backgrounds, components, and consequences of brand equity based on the use of online or offline media. The empirical application is performed on the basis of a sample of 225 visitors who have traveled to the following five European capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid. To evaluate the measurement model and contrast the hypotheses, we use partial least squares regression. The results of the study reveal relevant recommendations for tourism managers regarding city brand recognition, loyalty, and the equilibrium between offline and online tools to maximize brand equity.

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1. Introduction

Increased competition between destinations has led to a great

amount of interest in the management of brands representing locations and the implementation of measures that allow for greater differentiation (Bickford-Smith, 2009; Sahin & Baloglu, 2014). As a result, new concepts that refer to brands applied to territories such as place marketing, place branding, and city branding have appeared (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). Specifically, city branding refers to the study and management of brands representing cities and encompasses the study of several concepts linked to branding. One of the most widely used is the analysis of brand equity, i.e., the

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value generated by a brand of a product or service (Aaker, 1991). Several authors indicate that the value of a brand is a relevant concept in city branding (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Zenker, 2011). This term is complex to analyze and measure, especially when it applies to destinations (Berry, 2000). Therefore, most research is based on theoretical content (Zenker, 2011) and not on measurements applied to brand equity. However, some authors indicate that the implementation of models that allow for the quantification of brand equity represents a critical opportunity for destination decision-making (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993).

Conventional or offline advertising tools such as brochures, fairs, newspapers, and magazines have traditionally been the main tools used to create brand equity for products in general and for destinations in particular. However, taking into account the relevant nature of online spaces, coming to know how the use of online communication channels influences the brand equity of cities is an area of interest (Hanna & Rowley, 2015). In other words, determining the existence or non-existence of differences in the city branding of cities based on their use of online or offline information sources is of great interest. This aspect is key for the design and implementation of appropriate strategies in tourist-dependent cities. A review of the literature reveals that online branding is a necessity for cities that wish to compete in a global market and be international destinations (Björner, 2013). The most visible face of online branding strategies may be webpages and social media networks, among other aspects. In that sense, having an official webpage has become an essential tool in city branding, and cities are increasingly using social networks in their branding strategies (Paganoni, 2012). Virtual communities are increasingly acting as a global showcase in which users actively participate by exchanging information (Callarisa, Sánchez, Cardiff, & Roshchina, 2012). However, despite the importance of the Internet in positioning destinations, not all consumers have direct contact with the network. As a result, some authors even point to possible differences between offline and online search behaviors and the consequences for the generation of city brand value (Levin, Levin, & Heath, 2003; Levin, Irwin, & Weller, 2005), although the number of empirical studies that contrast this aspect is reduced. The existing research is especially focused on aspects such as the purchasing behavior of tourist services (Roldán-Cataluña, Arenas-Gaitán, & Ramírez-Correa, 2015), but there are no relevant studies that compare aspects that are directly linked to brands, which have been studied in other services such as banking (Leelakulthanit & Hongcharu, 2011; Yap, Wong, Loh, & Bak, 2010).

After addressing the relevance of analyzing brand equity for destinations by taking into account the differences in information sources, an analysis was conducted to define the details of the empirical application. First, given that it is the most visited region in the world, Europe was selected. With an increase of 4%, it received 22 million more tourist arrivals during 2014 than in the previous year, reaching a total of 585 million tourists (UNWTO, 2015). Second, it was decided to focus the study on cities because of the importance of urban tourism in the socioeconomic context, given that it is presented as an opportunity to diversify and de-seasonalize certain countries identified by a specific type of tourism (Wöber, 2014). To select the cities, the number of nights stayed in each city was considered. Third, given their leading role in brand equity studies that focus on destinations (Callarisa et al., 2012), it was considered appropriate to study the opinions of visitors.

For these reasons, the primary objective of this article is to analyze and evaluate city branding in European capitals from the perspective of visitors, focusing on the differences in brand equity based on the manner in which visitors search for city information. To that end, we propose an empirical application based on the

analysis of the following five European capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid. In particular, we define the main components, historical background, and consequences of brand equity in the destinations to determine the principal differences, based on the use of online or offline resources, in brand creation and the attraction of tourists, i.e., between visitors who use the Internet as a search tool and those who use offline sources of information.

2. Literature review

2.1. City branding and brand equity

A brand is defined as the attributes that are linked to the name and logo associated with the personality of goods and that favor a unique positioning (Aaker, 1996). This concept applies to both products and services and especially to territories (countries, regions, and cities) (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993). The concept that identifies the brand as applied to locations is designated place marketing or place branding, and when applied to cities, it is known as city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). City branding arose in the 1990s as a result of increased competition between destinations (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006). For these authors, it is a very useful instrument for managing cities and identifying opportunities and threats for each location.

Research on city branding addresses different topics, such as brand management (Bickford-Smith, 2009); global brands from the corporate perspective (Parkerson & Saunders, 2005); marketing tools for destinations (Sahin & Baloglu, 2014); city branding typologies (Marceau, 2008); brand image generation (Middleton, 2011, pp. 15–25); and the study of brand equity (brand value) (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Zenker, 2011).

Brand equity is a widely studied concept in the context of city branding (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). The conceptualization of this term can be analyzed from different perspectives. From the economic point of view, brand equity is defined as monetary benefits or results that a brand provides to organizations (Buil, Martínez, & de Chernatony, 2013). Brand equity represents the monetary value minus the resources required to obtain it (Aaker, 1991, 1996). The role of the brand is consequently linked to the asset of companies that promotes the generation of cash flow (Biel, 1992). From the consumer or promotional perspective, brand equity represents the value of brands in customers' minds (Keller, 1993). Difficult to measure, the term is defined as the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand (Aaker, 1996).

Although there are different opinions regarding its measurement, most authors define it as a construct formed by a range of diverse dimensions (Keller, 1993). In general, recognition, loyalty, perceived quality, and associations (including brand image and perceived value, among others) are the dimensions included in most research studies (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993; Veloutsou, Christodoulides, & de Chernatony, 2013). Studies on brand equity regarding tourist destinations consider these same dimensions by making specific adaptations due to the intangible nature of destinations (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Kim, Hyunjung, & King, 2015; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Zavattaro, Daspit, & Adams, 2015).

On that basis, this study uses three dimensions to measure brand equity: recognition, loyalty, and perceived quality; and brand image has been evaluated as an antecedent, following the contributions of Faircloth, Capella, and Alford (2001). In addition, we consider attitude towards the brand as a second antecedent because, for the value of a brand of a product of service to be high, it is necessary to have a favorable attitude and a solid brand image (Farquhar, 1989). Finally, we estimate that the preference for a brand is developed as a direct consequence of brand equity because the positive evaluation of this concept generates a preference for

the destination (Cobb-Walgreen, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995).

Recognition symbolizes the capacity of an individual to distinguish and recognize a brand when compared to its competitors (Barreda, 2014), and it is one of the principal components of brand equity, both for products (Aaker, 1996) and for destinations (Oh, 2000). Loyalty is defined as the intent to purchase again or invite others to acquire a specific product or service (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000). It is a widely used concept in several different studies linked to goods (Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, Michel, & Corraliza-Zapata, 2013) and services such as tourist destinations (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). Perceived quality is the personal evaluation of a brand made by individuals (Zeithaml, 1988). It is one of the most relevant dimensions in building brand equity for tangible (Jahanzeb, Tasneem, & Mohsin, 2013) and intangible (Low & Lamb, 2000) resources.

Attitude towards a brand is a personal evaluation of each brand, including the predisposition for a specific product or service, and it is a relevant concept in building brand equity (Chang & Liu, 2009; Zeithaml, 1988). In general, the majority of authors define it as a unidimensional construct, and specifically in the context of destinations, attitude towards a brand is linked to aspects such as fulfilling the needs of visitors or opinions about a city (Grimm, 2005; Keller, 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Brand image is defined as the perception of a brand in the mind of a consumer (Keller, 2003). In destinations, it is a concept of association between the brand and the tourist destination, i.e., the characteristics that distinguish and make a territory unique (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Brand image is a multi-dimensional construct for certain authors (Martínez & Pina, 2009). However, the unidimensional proposal is increasingly used in the context of tourism (Lassar et al., 1995), following proposals by authors studying brand equity who associate brand image with personality (Aaker, 1991, 1996). Finally, we define the preference for a brand as one of the primary effects with which brand equity is linked. It is a link between the value provided by a brand and the selection of a destination versus its competitors (Chang & Liu, 2009; Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995).

In terms of the relationships between these concepts, following several authors, first, we estimate the influence of attitude towards a brand on brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Chang & Liu, 2009; Faircloth et al., 2001; Keller, 1993). Second, we propose the influence of attitude towards a brand on brand image. Several researchers point to the indirect influence of attitude towards the brand on brand equity through brand image (Chang & Liu, 2009; Faircloth et al., 2001). Third, we confirm the relationship between brand image and brand equity because the former contributes to the creation of the latter (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). Several authors argue that brand image is a strategic element that favors the brand equity of a product or service (Barreda, 2014; Saydan, 2013). Fourth, we ratify the relationship between brand equity and preference for a brand (Buil et al., 2013; Jahanzeb et al., 2013).

2.2. The internet in the brand context

Several studies have predicted that the development of the Internet would change the ways in which branding and brand management are performed (De Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Ind & Riondino, 2001; Lindstrom, 2001; Sterne, 1999). From a marketing perspective, the Internet provides companies with new advertising, sales and distribution channels, and support for the prescription or recommendation of clients. Many organizations recognize the need to integrate marketing communications into offline and online channels in the digital world.

The manner in which branding is performed has changed in recent years due to the surge in social media networks as a means of allowing users to generate brand content. Social networks

include discussion forums, blogs, social platforms, the sharing of images, videos, and news, and even networks, relationships, and interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). When the brand and users co-create brand histories, the owners or managers of the brand have no control over them (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Currently, web content that was previously controlled by large companies and organizations is the expression of the interaction and participation of end users (Munar, 2010).

In a globalized and increasingly competitive world, international positioning through online branding has become a necessity for cities that wish to compete in a global market (Björner, 2013). Currently, an official webpage is an essential tool for city branding, and cities are increasingly using social networks in their branding strategies (Paganoni, 2012).

The development of the Internet and its tools has also changed the manner in which cities can and should communicate and build their local brands. Rowley (2004) argues that online environments by nature offer services based on information. The conceptualization of the brand as an experience emphasizes the fact that the brand is built based on not only what the organization states but also what the user does and experiences. This fact is a challenge for the branding of places, given that it is necessary to have a physical presence in the destination to experience the place and it is possible that the promises made in the online communication exceed the reality of the place. In recent years, not only the number of Internet users but also the time spent navigating online has grown. This growth has made branding at a global level more possible than ever.

Having a webpage has become a basic tool in city branding. Currently, cities are focusing their efforts on obtaining an ever greater presence on social networks. Therefore, they are necessary elements in marketing, which means that destinations that lack a presence on YouTube, Facebook, or any other social network are not part of cyberspace (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Online branding has become a tool that allows brands to provide useful information, create notoriety, encourage brand recollection, attract new users, generate engagement, and interact with users (Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012; McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth, & Pioch, 2014; Rowley, 2009).

Web 2.0 tools are increasingly used by tourists to obtain information about different tourist destinations and share their tourist experiences. The digital content generated by these tourists is increasingly having an influence on the notoriety and image of destinations (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This evolution is due to the appearance of hardware and software that are increasingly accessible and powerful, faster networks, the introduction of easy-to-use tools to create and share content, the increased consumption of online content, and the growth of portable and wireless platforms (Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007).

In that sense, two online branding strategies can be differentiated: (1) the promotion and communication of the values of brand, identity, and personality; and (2) the creation of online communities that are associated with the brand. Due to the large amount of information available on the network, brand managers are forced to continue innovating and developing new tools to communicate their brands. As a result, we refer to a new communication model concept. Currently, the communication of cities is performed not only by journalists but also through the new channels that have appeared with the Internet. Individuals have become not only receivers of messages but also promoters themselves. In addition, the cost of sending messages is minimal, and the tools for doing so are diverse. Therefore, everyone creates a parallel circulation of information (Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007).

An indicator of this new phenomenon is the appearance of prosumers, i.e., a segment of users between consumers and

professionals. These are active participants who instigate a dialogue with the city and with the users and non-users of online sources. In fact, cities have changed their communication strategies and the associated tools. Prosumers always look for more and more information, are present in the virtual reality, exchange opinions, files, and personal data, participate in discussions, and watch and upload videos. Gerhardt (2008) shows that currently, life is complex because it combines demands from work and an active family life. Prosumers are individuals who wish for Web 2.0 products and services, which tend to include blogs, videos, podcasting, virtual reality, mobile communications, and other Internet-based technologies that allow people to be connected whenever and wherever they wish.

According to Gertner, Berger, and Gertner (2006), in using the Internet, consumers can share their opinions and positive and negative experiences with the rest of the world, regardless of where they are. Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube make it easier for anyone to comment on a publication about any destination. All types of users, individuals, celebrities, politicians, and companies have adopted Twitter as a means of being connected with friends, stakeholders, and objective audiences. Therefore, for cities to be successful in their efforts to attract visitors, they must design marketing and online branding strategies. Due to the immense competition to attract the attention of Internet users, a memorable name and web address must be ensured. In the case of a nation that wishes to promote itself online as a destination, no other name could be as distinctive, easy to remember, and impossible to imitate as the name of the country itself (Gerhardt, 2008).

Changes in economic, cultural, and technological conditions have led consumers to increase their Internet usage when searching to save time and money; simultaneously, organizations have been able to use the Internet to improve their relationships with their clients or discuss their companies, services, or brands. For example, Twitter is a good means through which destinations can build their brand equity because it offers two different communication opportunities: (1) it is a cost-effective method for sending mass messages; and (2) it allows the user to interact with other users, developing new social relationships and sharing information. As a result, tourist destinations will be able to promote themselves through destination websites, but the difficulty will be in knowing what image to use in their promotion. Regardless, destinations communicate through their webpages the three categories associated with a brand, i.e., attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Blumrodt & Palmer, 2013), to obtain a favorable positioning.

2.3. Online versus offline differences in city branding

There are several studies that have analyzed trends and practices or the differences in brand equity depending on whether consumers are online or offline. Sunil (2015) defines the principal factors that influence searches for information and online or offline shopping: sales, products, and service policies. Leelakulthanit and Hongcharu (2011) particularly focus on aspects such as brand loyalty and identify the main elements of loyalty, based on the type of client, in the study they conducted on the banking sector. Specifically, consumers who use online sources favorably evaluate functional aspects such as service, convenience, price, and reputation. Meanwhile, offline clients positively evaluate quality and social value, among others. Yap et al. (2010) also highlight the relevance of the perceived quality of the service in this same sector and identify the key attributes in online and offline environments, with discrepancies and interrelationships. In addition, Kwon and Lennon (2009) study the differences between the Internet and

conventional media from the perspective of attitude towards the brand and brand image. These authors highlight the divergences between both forms of media in the context of retailing but point to the positive effect of multichannel collaboration on the companies' results.

In the context of destinations, until relatively recently, tourist services were physically purchased at a travel agency or through some other intermediary. However, starting approximately two decades ago, the boom in new technologies has been led to changes in the channels used by consumers to obtain information about destinations to visit and to purchase travel packages and lodging. Regarding this phenomenon, Ramírez and Jiménez (2013) state that the more intangible the product is, the higher the probability of buying it in the online channel. In addition, Levin et al. (2003, 2005) point to differences in the search for information and online and offline behavior with respect to different types of products, including airplane tickets. In addition, they analyze the differences between products or services that require complete information before making an online purchase and experience goods, i.e., those in which previous contact with the product is required to have detailed information about the main attributes. Therefore, for the former, online purchasing is much simpler. Roldán-Cataluña et al. (2015) point to the importance of the experience that comes with products and services, and they argue that this importance is more vulnerable than the tangible component. These authors also focus on the analysis of discrepancies in the purchasing behavior of visitors depending on whether they acquire tourist services through online media, travel agencies, or other traditional media. Specifically, telepresence and word-of-mouth are the main variables that most affect visitors who manage their services online, whereas tourists who employ conventional media are more influenced by travel agencies and their own experience. Therefore, the behavior of both groups is different, despite the fact that they both share an interest in the Internet and social networks. In addition, Garrod and Kosowska (2012) indicate that communication channels generate specific images of the destinations. Furthermore, taking into account the progressive popularity of online media, the images projected through the Internet should be analyzed carefully because, compared to offline media, their control is less stringent.

The Internet has led to a change in the management of tourist brands, generating differences based on the type of media used, online or offline. In that sense, webpages and social networks become the most important tools for generating branding and the preference for the brand of a destination (Andéhn, Kazeminia, Lucarelli, & Sevin, 2014; Hanna & Rowley, 2015). Chen, Grace, and Kim (2014) argue that the search for information online, if adequately performed, can provide valuable information for decision-making by managers and those responsible for companies and public entities. It is important for companies and entities to work on the design of effective webpages for tourists who are searching for travel information. The study by Trueman, Cornelius, and Wallace (2012) refers to the fact that the webpages of the local companies of a tourist city contribute to generating city branding. Aligned with the changes induced by the Internet in the tourism sector and based on the differences perceived according to the source of information to manage travel, some authors such as Go and Govers (2010) even indicate that branding strategies should be multichannel, i.e., include both offline and online media, and reflect the same brand values across all their channels.

With these antecedents, it is worth asking: have destinations designed their online channels (webpages, social networks, etc.) in order to improve the value of their brands and, consequently, to make their touristic places more preferable? To answer this

question, the aim of the present study is to analyze whether there are differences in brand equity and the preference for brands when comparing two groups of individuals: tourists who use online channels to search for information, purchase their trips, and plan their visits to destinations and those who use offline media. Based on the previous theoretical review, the following hypotheses can be formulated (Fig. 1):

H1. In the process of generating brand equity for a destination, there are significant differences between those who consult online and offline sources of information regarding the following dimensions: (H1a) brand recognition; (H1b) brand loyalty; and (H1c) the perceived quality of the brand.

H2. Regarding the influence of attitude towards the brand on brand equity for a destination, there are significant differences between those who consult online and offline sources of information.

H3. Regarding the influence of attitude towards the brand on brand image, there are significant differences between those who consult online and offline sources of information.

H4. Regarding the influence of brand image on brand equity for a destination, there are significant differences between those who consult online and offline sources of information.

H5. Regarding the influence of brand equity on the preference for a brand for a destination, there are significant differences between those who consult online and offline sources of information.

3. Methodology

The sample for this study was composed of visitors who have traveled to one of the Western European capitals targeted in this study (London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid). Europe is the most visited region in the world, with a total of 585 million tourists

arriving in 2014, ahead of Asia, the Pacific and America (UNWTO, 2015). To identify the individuals, two phases were formulated: a pretest and an online survey. First, a pretest was conducted through snowball sampling to confirm that the questionnaire was correctly designed. This technique was used by academics and tourism professionals in the first stage, and consists of a non-probability sampling method with which to recruit future subjects from their acquaintances. To select the European capitals, the reference was the greatest number of nights recorded in 2013, according to the Third International Summit on Urban Tourism, which was held in Barcelona in 2014. London has a total of 54,862 bed-nights in thousands, followed by Paris (36,679), Berlin (26,942), Rome (24,161), and Madrid (14,874). In this respect, a sample of visitors who had visited more than two capitals in the last five years was drawn from a national consumer panel. One of these journeys had to have taken place in the last year. To achieve a homogeneous sample, others conditions were established in the sample: (1) they had to have spent a minimum of two nights at each destination; (2) visitors had to have traveled for leisure purposes; (3) experience in travelling, i.e., making more than two trips per year, was necessary; and (3) they had to have visited the city at least once.

Once these parameters were defined, random sampling among the visitors was performed once they were assigned to one of the five cities that they had already visited in the last year, and after filtering the data, a total of 225 valid questionnaires were obtained. In general, 77.8% of those surveyed defined themselves as active users of online media when searching and planning their trips, compared to the 22.2% who used offline media. Among the online media, visitors mainly used the Internet, tourism webpages, and social networks (Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter), whereas some of the offline sources that stood out were travel guides, brochures, magazines, travel agencies, newspapers, and fairs.



Note: AW: brand awareness; LO: brand loyalty; PQ: perceived quality.

Fig. 1. Brand equity model according to online vs. offline sources of information. Note: AW: brand awareness; LO: brand loyalty; PQ: perceived quality.

Subsequently, the data collection was performed through an online survey. Following the recommendations of several studies (Dennis, 2001; Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005; Li, 2006; McWilliams & Nadkarni, 2005), the people who participate in an online survey travel with greater frequency, tend to have higher earnings and university degrees, are older than 25 years of age, and exhibit a 50–50 proportion by gender. Therefore, the people who fulfilled these criteria have the typical profile of visitors of European capitals as it was confirmed in the study's sample. The profile of the visitors' sample is defined as people with university studies and a high household income per month. In all the cities except Paris, there is a similar proportion of men and women, and visitors who are over 25 years of age predominate. The visitor's profile of each city is shown in Table 1.

The sample units for the study (visitors of European cities) were able to evaluate, the measurement scales for the brands of the cities analyzed. In terms of the time period, to obtain more homogeneity in the responses and coincidence in the questions referring to a specific moment in time, it was deemed convenient to conduct the field work in adjustment to a limited period of time, concentrating on the spring of 2014.

The questionnaire used in this study contains information on the measuring scales regarding attitude towards the brand, brand image, brand equity, and preference for a brand. All of the indicators were measured using a Likert scale with 11 positions (0 = totally disagreement; 10 = totally agreement) (Table 2).

To formulate the theoretical model of this study, a rigorous analysis of the scales analyzed was conducted, differentiating between concepts that are unidimensional (attitude towards the brand, brand image and preference towards the brand) and multidimensional in nature (brand equity). Specifically, for the latter, it was considered that the dimensions were reflectively related with their items formatively related to their indicators. Therefore, this study presents a second-order model in which brand equity is conceptualized based on three formative

dimensions influenced by attitude and image of the brand, as done in other studies (Arnett, Laverie, & Meiers, 2003; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

The technique used to estimate the model is partial least squares (PLS), a tool that exhibits several advantages with respect to structural equation modeling (SEM) models (Fornell & Larcker, 1981): simplicity, predictive capacity, adaptability to studies with sample sizes smaller than 250, and flexibility with reflective and formative indicators. Specifically, the software used was SmartPLS 3, and bootstrapping was used for significance (Efron, 1979).

In addition, to contrast the hypothesis concerning the differences between individuals who employ online versus offline sources of information, the proposal by Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009), who present a procedure to perform non-parametric comparisons that is very appropriate for multi-group analysis in PLS, was used. Therefore, the probability of making an error when claiming that the population parameter of the group with a higher estimated path coefficient is higher than the group with a lower estimated coefficient (the p-value of the multi-group analysis) is given by the following expression:

$$P(b^{(1)} > b^{(2)} | \beta^{(1)} \leq \beta^{(2)}) = 1 - \sum_{v,j,i} \frac{\Theta(2b^{(1)} - b_j^{(1)} - 2b^{(2)} + b_i^{(2)})}{J^2}$$

where:

- $b^{(1)}$ and $b^{(2)}$ = estimated path coefficients;
- $\beta^{(1)}$ and $\beta^{(2)}$ = population parameters;
- J = number of bootstrap subsamples;
- $b_j^{(1)}$ and $b_i^{(2)}$ = estimated path coefficients in each of the J bootstrap subsamples;
- $b^{(1)}$ and $b^{(2)}$ = means of the estimated path coefficients in the J bootstrap subsamples; and

Table 1
Visitor's profile.

Variable	Options	London	Paris	Berlin	Rome	Madrid	Total
Gender	Men	47.3%	29.3%	53.3%	42.4%	48.5%	44.4%
	Women	52.7%	70.7%	46.7%	57.6%	51.5%	55.6%
Age	15–24	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	6.1%	7.6%
	25–34	36.4%	31.7%	66.7%	30.3%	27.3%	36.0%
	35–44	21.8%	31.7%	13.3%	15.2%	34.8%	25.3%
	45–54	10.9%	19.5%	6.7%	27.3%	19.7%	16.9%
	55–64	10.9%	17.1%	13.3%	12.1%	10.6%	12.4%
	Over 65	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	6.1%	1.5%	1.8%
Marital status	Single	40.0%	31.7%	70.0%	36.4%	36.4%	40.9%
	Living as a couple	23.6%	9.8%	3.3%	15.2%	18.2%	15.6%
	Married	32.7%	46.3%	26.7%	45.5%	42.4%	39.1%
	Separated/divorced	3.6%	7.3%	0.0%	3.0%	3.0%	3.6%
	Widower	0.0%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Employment status	Employee	81.8%	85.4%	86.7%	66.7%	74.2%	78.7%
	Self-employed	1.8%	2.4%	13.3%	9.1%	6.1%	5.8%
	Unemployed	3.6%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	2.2%
	Freelancer	5.5%	2.4%	0.0%	6.1%	6.1%	4.4%
	Student	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%	6.1%	6.1%	3.6%
	Retired	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	9.1%	3.0%	2.7%
	Housewife	1.8%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	1.3%
	Others	1.8%	2.4%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Household income per month	<1000 €	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.1%	1.8%
	1000 - 1500 €	12.7%	9.8%	26.7%	12.1%	13.6%	14.2%
	1501 - 2000 €	16.4%	17.1%	26.7%	18.2%	10.6%	16.4%
	2001 - 2500 €	9.1%	14.6%	20.0%	15.2%	15.2%	14.2%
	2501 - 3000 €	10.9%	12.2%	3.3%	27.3%	18.2%	14.7%
	>3000 €	50.9%	46.3%	23.3%	27.3%	36.4%	38.7%

Table 2
Score and impact of each brand equity component.

Concept/Dimension	Items	References
Attitude towards the brand	Unidimensional (AB1) Feeling identified (AB2) I like it (AB3) Fulfilling needs (AB4) Positive opinion (AB5) Adequate quality	Chang and Liu (2009); Grimm (2005); Keller (1993); Yoo et al. (2000);
Brand image	Unidimensional (BI1) Own identity (BI2) Interesting brand (BI3) Tourist image type	Aaker (1991, 1996)
Brand equity	Brand awareness (AW1) Easy to recognize (AW2) First to come to mind (AW3) Unique in my mind Brand loyalty (LO1) Encouraging visit (LO2) My preferred choice (LO3) Positive aspects Perceived quality (PQ1) Better quality than other (PQ2) One of the better (PQ3) Consistent quality Brand equity (BE1) Worth visiting (BE2) Liking identification	Aaker (1991, 1996); Berry (2000); Boo et al. (2009); Keller (1993); Konecnik and Gartner (2007)
Brand preference	Unidimensional (BP1) Superior image (BP2) Visit preference (BP3) First choice	Chang and Liu (2009)

Θ = a function that takes the value of 1 if its result is greater than 0 and 0 if its result is lower or equal to 0.

Before proceeding to make the comparisons, configuration invariance was confirmed. That is, we demonstrated the use of the same measurement instrument in each sample, i.e., the same indicators, guaranteeing the configuration invariance of the measurement instrument. The proposal of Henseler et al. (2009) was used as a basis on which to partially confirm the metric invariance, since there were at least two equal loadings in all the concepts.

4. Results

Before contrasting the formulated hypotheses in this study, we proceeded to validate the measurement instrument. First, the

measuring model was analyzed in terms of reliability and convergent validity, both for the total model and for online and offline. The indicators used to calculate the reliability of the dimensions that are reflective in nature show satisfactory levels: (1) a Cronbach's alpha above or approximately 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994); (2) a composite reliability index (CRI) above 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); and (3) the average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Once the reliability was confirmed, we also verified the convergent validity of the scale used. The results exhibit factorial loads of the measurement variables above 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) and significantly different from zero. The analysis conducted demonstrates the need to eliminate three reflective indicators because they have loads that are lower than 0.6 (Table 3), specifically, two indicators of attitude towards the brand, AB4 (negative opinion) and AB5 (quality of service in this non-

Table 3
Reliability and convergent validity of reflective constructs.

First-order constructs	Indicators	Factor loadings		α ; CR; AVE)
		Online (ON)	Offline (OF)	
AB	AB1. Feeling identified	0.930*** (50.989)	0.877*** (12.450)	ON: (0.777; 0.844; 0.655) OF: (0.879; 0.926; 0.806)
	AB2. I like it	0.529*** (3.340)	0.854*** (17.177)	
	AB3. Fulfilling needs	0.905*** (31.491)	0.959*** (53.913)	
BI	BI1. Own identity	0.835*** (22.817)	0.754*** (5.627)	ON: (0.785; 0.875; 0.700) OF: (0.814; 0.891; 0.733)
	BI2. Interesting brand	0.875*** (36.478)	0.922*** (23.047)	
	BI3. Tourist image type	0.797*** (19.906)	0.883*** (16.040)	
AW	AW1. Easy to recognize	0.923*** (65.821)	0.922*** (39.260)	ON: (0.770; 0.896; 0.812) OF: (0.782; 0.901; 0.820)
	AW2. First to come to mind	0.879*** (32.125)	0.890*** (18.532)	
LO	LO1. Encouraging visit	0.662*** (9.406)	0.693*** (5.796)	ON: (0.678; 0.825; 0.614) OF: (0.792; 0.882; 0.717)
	LO2. My preferred choice	0.848*** (23.489)	0.918*** (38.674)	
	LO3. Positive aspects	0.828*** (17.381)	0.910*** (26.439)	
PQ	PQ1. Better quality than other	0.881*** (38.265)	0.909*** (32.845)	ON: (0.840; 0.904; 0.758) OF: (0.878; 0.925; 0.804)
	PQ2. One of the better	0.874*** (44.946)	0.913*** (34.292)	
	PQ3. Consistent quality	0.856*** (28.928)	0.868*** (10.990)	
BE	BE1. Worth visiting	0.904*** (38.532)	0.936*** (25.367)	ON: (0.836; 0.923; 0.857) OF: (0.882; 0.944; 0.894)
	BE2. Liking identification	0.947*** (136.216)	0.955*** (59.409)	
BP	BP1. Superior image	0.856*** (20.319)	0.855*** (24.397)	ON: (0.726; 0.840; 0.638) OF: (0.764; 0.861; 0.675)
	BP2. Visit preference	0.827*** (13.049)	0.858*** (11.030)	
	BP3. First choice	0.706*** (9.009)	0.746*** (6.419)	

Note: ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10; (valor t bootstrap); AB: attitude towards the brand; BI: brand image; AW: brand awareness; LO: brand loyalty; PQ: perceived quality; BE: brand equity; BP: brand preference.

Table 4
Discriminant validity of reflective constructs.

Group		AB	BI	AW	LO	PQ	BE	PB
Online	AB	0.655						
	BI	0.470	0.700					
	AW	-0.145	0.308	0.812				
	LO	0.025	0.302	0.584	0.614			
	PQ	0.020	0.317	0.640	0.599	0.758		
	BE	0.045	0.352	0.754	0.442	0.755	0.857	
	PB	0.224	0.442	0.484	0.431	0.451	0.356	0.638
Offline	AB	0.806						
	BI	0.513	0.733					
	AW	-0.189	0.134	0.820				
	LO	-0.050	0.236	0.640	0.717			
	PQ	0.027	0.290	0.767	0.661	0.804		
	BE	-0.030	0.310	0.780	0.660	0.709	0.894	
	PB	0.196	0.490	0.596	0.575	0.616	0.657	0.675

Note: Diagonal: average variance extracted (AVE); below diagonal: squared inter-construct correlation; AB: attitude towards the brand; BI: brand image; AW: brand awareness; LO: brand loyalty; PQ: perceived quality; BE: brand equity; BP: brand preference.

appropriate European capital); and an indicator of brand recognition, AW3 (only one that comes to mind). Once these three indicators were eliminated, the results exhibited an adequate specification of the proposed factorial structure.

Taking into account that this model is a formative model, the lack of collinearity is confirmed using the variance inflation factor (VIF) with values lower than 3 (Petter, Straub, & Rai, 2007). Finally, the data from the test of extracted variance show that the AVEs are higher than the squares of the correlations, which ratifies that there are no discriminant validity problems in the total model or in the online and offline models (Table 4).

After evaluating the measuring instrument, we present the estimation of the structural model, which studies the relationships between the constructs through path coefficients and their significance. Starting from the coefficients obtained and their significance, we proceed to contrast the hypotheses. In this manner, we indicate the result of each of the hypotheses proposed in the model of brand equity of the European capitals. Specifically, we present the results of the multi-group analysis, considering two ways of searching for information when planning to travel to a tourist destination, through online (web or social networks, among others) or offline (conventional media such as brochures or fairs, among others) tools. Following the formulation of the methodology section, to contrast the hypotheses concerning the differences between the groups, the proposal by Henseler et al. (2009) (Table 5) was used.

First, when creating brand equity, one can observe that the relationship is positive and significant in recognition of the brand for individuals who search for information through the Internet

($\beta = 0.452$; $p < 0.01$) but that it is not significant for those who employ conventional media ($\beta = 0.289$; $p > 0.10$). However, there are no differences between the groups (p -value = 0.302). Regarding destination loyalty, one can observe that the influence is not significant in any group (online $\beta = 0.-0.048$; $p > 0.10$; offline $\beta = 0.672$; $p > 0.10$) and that there are no differences between individuals who consult online or offline (p -value = 0.203). With respect to quality, there is a positive and significant relationship in the online model ($\beta = 0.391$; $p < 0.01$); nevertheless, the influence is not significant in the second case ($\beta = 0.402$; $p > 0.10$). In no case is there a significant difference between both groups of visitors (p -value = 0.500).

With respect to the influence of attitude towards the brand on brand equity, the results show that in no case is the influence significant, and a negative value is shown in the offline model (online $\beta = 0.071$; $p > 0.10$; offline $\beta = -0.057$; $p > 0.10$), indicating no significant differences between the two groups (p -value = 0.137). By contrast, there is a positive and significant influence of attitude towards brand image (online $\beta = 0.470$; $p < 0.01$; offline $\beta = 0.513$; $p < 0.01$), although no differences are perceived between the two ways of searching for information (p -value = 0.378). In the case of the influence of brand image on brand equity, there is only a significant relationship in the second case (online $\beta = 0.070$; $p > 0.10$; offline $\beta = 0.152$; $p < 0.10$), and again, there are no differences between the two groups (p -value = 0.225).

Finally, when analyzing the influence of brand equity on the preference for a destination, there is a positive and significant relationship for both types of information searches (online $\beta = 0.356$; $p < 0.01$; offline $\beta = 0.657$; $p < 0.01$). In this case, the influence on individuals who use offline media is significantly higher than that for other tourists (p -value = 0.004). Therefore, we can only confirm the existence of significant differences in the influence of brand equity on the preference for a destination (H5), rejecting the remaining hypotheses.

To guarantee better evidence on the validity of the measuring instrument, we formulated relationships between the constructs in a manner that was consistent and coherent with the theory. The results showed that the variables maintained positive correlations, and as a result, we can state that there is nomological validity in the total model and in the models of information searching through online and offline media.

In addition, as shown in Table 6, it is confirmed that all of the values of the coefficients of determination R^2 exceed the minimum recommended value. The Stone-Geisser test Q^2 exhibits values higher than zero (Chin, 1998), confirming the predictive relevance

Table 5
Hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesized paths	Online		Offline		Multi-group comparison	
	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value	p-value	Result
H1a: AWn → BEn	0.452***	3.959	0.289	0.919	0.302	ON=OF
H1b: LOn → BEn	-0.048	0.523	0.132	0.672	0.203	ON=OF
H1c: PQn → BEn	0.391***	3.562	0.402	1.296	0.500	ON=OF
H2: ABn → BEn	0.071	1.188	-0.057	0.547	0.137	ON=OF
H3: ABn → BIn	0.470***	7.632	0.513***	3.793	0.378	ON=OF
H4: BIn → BEn	0.070	1.277	0.152*	1.695	0.225	ON=OF
H5: BEn → BPn	0.356***	4.499	0.657***	8.461	0.004	OF>ON

Note: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$; (valor t bootstrap); AB: attitude towards the brand; BI: brand image; AW: brand awareness; LO: brand loyalty; PQ: perceived quality; BE: brand equity; BP: brand preference; ON: online; OF: offline.

Table 6
Evaluation of the estimated models.

Concept	Online		Offline	
	R ²	Q ²	R ²	Q ²
Brand image	22.1%	0.146	26.3%	0.165
Brand equity	12.7%	0.511	43.1%	0.536
Brand preference	63.3%	0.067	70.0%	0.256
Good-of-fit (GoF)	0.390		0.426	

of the model. The goodness of fit index exhibits a high value in all three models (GoF>0.36).

5. Discussion and conclusions

This research contributes to the knowledge on city branding through the study of brand equity from the perspective of visitors, conducting an analysis that compare the importance of using online versus offline information sources in generating city branding. The study fills an existing gap in the field of brand equity in the online and offline contexts because most tourism studies that consider both types of information sources are focused on other constructs such as purchasing behavior (Roldán et al., 2015), despite the importance of brands in services (Yap et al., 2010).

Given the increased competition between destinations, brand equity is a relevant concept for tourism managers. Therefore, this research provides new insights for the study of city branding; taking into account the complexity of analyzing brand equity as applied to destinations (Berry, 2000), it represents an important contribution to this field of study. Specifically, we present a model with brand equity as a multidimensional concept influenced by two dimensions, attitude towards the brand and brand image. In addition, this study validates measurement scales in the concepts analyzed, testing the instruments used in previous works, and it confirms the satisfactory use of formative measures that improve the specification of brand equity (Gil-Saura et al., 2013). This contribution is relevant, taking into account the problems derived from an incorrect specification of concepts. This research reflects the importance of brand equity from an economic and promotion perspective. On the one hand, the results highlight the profits generated from the creation of brand equity in organizations, as this concept determines the choice of a particular tourist destination rather than that of competitors (Buil et al., 2013). On the other hand, brand equity is the outcome of a set of assets linked to a brand that is developed in consumers' minds as the result of promotional actions (Aaker, 1996).

In addition, as a result of the greater complexity of managing destinations, there is a need to have useful tools for identifying the opportunities and threats presented by each city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006). Therefore, webpages and social networks are presented as relevant elements in contributing to city branding (Andéhn et al., 2014; Hanna & Rowley, 2015). However, the results of this study show that offline instruments continue to be critical in generating brand equity for cities. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature on brand equity for destinations by presenting a multi-group that uses online sources of information and conventional means.

From the practical perspective, this study compares the perspective of visitors who are informed about European capitals using online or offline channels through a technique of information analysis using PLS. On one hand, the online model reflects that the main component of brand equity is recognition, a result that is in line with results from other researchers (Aaker, 1996), followed by perceived quality (Low & Lamb, 2000). Perceived quality plays a

notable role in services, a result that is consistent with results from other authors, such as Yap et al. (2010). However, loyalty is presented as a not significant component in generating brand equity for European capitals, despite its relevance in generating value (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000). The study of the relationships between constructs reflects that there is no direct influence of attitude towards the brand on brand equity, as suggested by other authors (Faircloth et al., 2001). However, there is an influence of attitude towards the brand on brand image, a result that is in line with results from other researchers, considering that the former concept is an element associated with the latter (Keller, 1993). There is no evidence of any influence of brand image on brand equity because, although the value is positive, the relationship is not significant, despite the previous proposals in other studies (Aaker, 1996; Barreda, 2014). Finally, we validate the influence of brand equity on the preference for a brand, following the proposal of authors such as Buil et al. (2013). On the other hand, in the case of the model through offline media, none of the three components of brand equity generate influence in a significant manner; however, brand image significantly influences brand equity. In this case, there is confirmation of the mediating effect of attitude towards the brand on brand equity through brand image (Faircloth et al., 2001). Therefore, we confirm the existence of differences between both groups of individuals, a result that is consistent with the results from authors such as Levin et al. (2003, 2005) and Roldán et al. (2015).

5.1. Practical implications

With respect to the implications for business, when using online and offline sources of information, it is important to refer to aspects such as brand recognition among visitors who use offline media because the brand seems to be more visible in the Internet environment. Therefore, there would have to be an effort in promotional brochures, press advertising, or specialized magazines, among others, to drive the visualization of European capital brands and the main attractions offered.

Another important action refers to customer loyalty. The most loyal visitors are users of conventional media (although the influence is not significant). In reality, for active Internet users, the value is even negative. This fact is perhaps the result of being exposed to a larger number of promotional hits on tourist destinations. Therefore, on one hand, it would be advisable to optimize online promotional campaigns including re-marketing campaigns, i.e., online marketing actions that follow users with promotional material throughout their different online searches, because in some cases, the publicity that appears for a brand is so elevated that it negatively affects the interest in an advertised product or destination. On the other hand, there must be more work on acquiring the loyalty of visitors who search online. For example, shows or art exhibitions could be promoted, generating the desire and search for new activities in destinations that were previously visited.

The values obtained for perceived quality in both models are very similar, although they do not appear as significant in the offline option. However, we can claim that the quality of European cities is favorably estimated independent of the source of information used for the trip, and therefore, all of the elements are considered necessary to generate positive city branding. It is also advisable to creatively highlight brands in the online environment to favorably influence their brand image, given that it is lower than what is perceived among users of media not found on the Internet.

A final idea concerning sources of information refers to the need to search for a balance between online and offline sources. That is, the general trend considers a greater use of the Internet, and in addition, it is a more economical medium for businesses. As

indicated by several authors, to be successful with destinations and specifically with cities, work on designing marketing and online branding strategies that drive up city branding (Trueman et al., 2012) must be undertaken, paying special attention to the prosumers defined by Gerhardt (2008). However, it is necessary for managing entities to also continue promoting offline media because the preference for the destination brand is significantly higher among more traditional individuals, despite the relevant contribution of webpages and social networks in generating brand equity (Andéhn et al., 2014). Therefore, the marketing budgets managed by tourism entities should present a balanced distribution between online and offline media, which in recent years has not occurred, given the revolution resulting from the Internet. In other words, it is essential to design successful multichannel strategies, given the positive effects of online actions on offline activities, and vice versa (Go & Govers, 2010; Kwon & Lennon, 2009).

5.2. Limitations and future research

We present the main limitations of this study, some of which consider future lines of research. One of the main limitations is linked to the multi-group analysis, i.e., the study of brand equity as differentiated between searches in online and offline media. In line with Ramírez and Jiménez (2013), who state that the more intangible the product is, the higher the probability of buying it online, this study presents a significantly higher number of individuals who use the Internet when searching for information on their travel plans. However, in the future, it would be advisable to increase the sample size of visitors who use conventional media when searching for information on travel plans, given that the size of the current sample is reduced in proportion to the most active Internet users sampled. In addition, it may be interesting for future research to go further in-depth on each type of media to evaluate the most effective media in creating brand equity for destinations and, consequently, influencing preference. Individuals that consult both online and offline channels when searching for travel information have not been considered in this study. They should, however, be taken into account in future research.

The second limitation is linked to the technique used in the pretest with academics and professionals. In this respect, the pretest was performed using a snowball sample. However, in the future it might be advisable to use another technique not so dependent upon convenience.

The third limitation refers to the conceptualization and measurement of brand equity. This study chose the dimensions that were most widely used in the literature (recognition, loyalty, and perceived quality) (Boo et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2015; Veloutsou et al., 2013) and estimated that brand equity is influenced by attitude and brand image (Faircloth et al., 2001). However, other research considers brand image to be an additional component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991) or other antecedents, such as communication actions.

Another limitation is related to the European capitals selected, of which there were only five; thus, future research could perhaps increase the number of cities analyzed. Similarly, the study has been conducted only from the perspective of visitors, although other stakeholders such as business leaders (Gómez & Molina, 2012) and residents (Garrod, Fyall, Leask, & Reid, 2012) should also be taken into account to make comparisons relating the different perspectives. Finally, another method of collecting information could also be used to increase the interaction with those surveyed.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.005>.

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