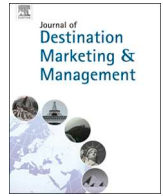




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Research paper

## The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and brand engagement in tourist destinations: An analysis in an emerging economy

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## ABSTRACT

The consolidation of Web 2.0 has modified the way people communicate and interact with tourists. User-generated social media communication continues to increase: to the detriment of traditional media channels, where the message is controlled by destination marketing organizations. Moreover, uncontrolled user-generated communication is increasingly considered more reliable than traditional, controlled communication. All this has considerably modified tourist perceptions regarding destination image and brand equity. From a business perspective, a line of thought addressing the study of these interrelationships has emerged in the literature, going so far as to consider their impact on brand engagement.

Despite the current prevalence and relevance of social media communication as a loyalty-building factor in a context as competitive as the tourism sector, relatively little literature has addressed it in emerging tourist destination scenarios. Hence, the present paper presents an analysis of how – and to what extent – social media communication, both controlled and uncontrolled by the destination organization, has an impact on destination brand equity and destination brand engagement. More specifically, this study applies it to an emerging economy scenario: Metropolitan Lima, Peru. The implications of our research, presented at the end of the paper, are of interest – both as a contribution to the literature and from the perspective of tourist destination management – and can serve to aid the economic and social development of emerging economies.

## 1. Introduction

Destination tourism has a significant impact on a country's economic development, especially in terms of job creation rates (Liu & Chou, 2016). Hence, management by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) is especially relevant in the case of emerging destinations (De Moya & Jain, 2013). However, as Bianchi, Pike, and Lings (2014) point out, enhancing the positive perception of destination branding in this type of destination is markedly difficult. Through place branding – understood as applying product brand management to the destination – DMOs develop strategies aimed at adding value to the brands associated with given tourist destinations. Such strategies focus on factors that enhance tourist perceptions of destination brand equity as a means to attract potential customers and foster current customer loyalty to the destination (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Im, Kim, Elliot, & Han, 2012). Despite its importance, recent studies indicate that destination brand equity still requires more comprehensive analysis (e.g. Dedeoglu, Van Niekerk, Weinland, & Celuch, 2019; Frías, Sabiote, Martín, & Beerli, 2018; Herrero, San Martín, García de los Salmones, & Collado,

2017).

In order to link positive destination brand perceptions with tourist preferences, tourism organizations should strive to maximize the effectiveness of their communication efforts (Godey et al., 2016). Currently, Web 2.0 – or the social web – enjoys widespread acceptance among consumers, in general (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016), and tourists in particular (Seric & Gil, 2012), providing easy-access, low-cost communication platforms (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). This has led to a loss of impact among more traditional communication media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), as the use of social media empowers customers with the ability to publish and share both positive and negative content: hence the power to impact brand reputation through the free expression/exchange of ideas (Eisingerich, Auh, & Merlo, 2014). From a business perspective, the social web allows for faster access to a larger volume of customers, permitting on-going interaction with the customer base via active participation in social media channels (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007).

Given such challenges, response strategies must be developed to face new situations, with a view both to maximize the potential of

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social media-based interaction and minimize possible negative repercussions (Naumov & Tao, 2017). This is especially complex for DMOs, which – due to a lack of technological experience and human resource, time and financial restrictions – often find it difficult to position themselves effectively via social media marketing (Mistilis, Buhalis, & Gretzel, 2014). Nevertheless, DMOs must be aware of the key role technological innovations play as drivers of business performance, economic growth and social change in emerging countries (Yunis, Tarhini, & Kassar, 2018), and of the importance of effectively managing both tourist-generated and company-generated communication through social channels to obtain positive outcomes.

Few studies to date, however, have focused on the impact of social media communication on brand equity perception from the broad perspective of hospitality (e.g. Seric, 2017; Seric & Gil, 2012), or the impact company-generated communication has on destination branding (e.g. de Rosa, Bocci, & Dryjanska, 2019; Shao, Li, Morrison, & Wu, 2016). Moreover, recent literature also recognizes the potential role that social media plays in the degree of brand engagement (Gómez, López, & Molina, 2019), potentially having a very significant deferred impact on brand equity and profitability (van Doorn et al., 2010).

In this context, many sectors encounter that merely transferring existing business models and practices from established Western markets is not enough. Such is the case of emerging economies, where some of the most popular DMOs can be found. These markets require greater knowledge of local peculiarities, emerging market idiosyncrasies and consumer behaviors (Gamble, 2010). Yet, surprisingly, research in emerging contexts is scarce.

Given the interest of both topic and context, the general objective of this study is therefore to identify how both tourist- and DMO-generated social media communication affects the brand equity of an emergent destination and how this can affect relational aspects with customers. Our specific objectives are (i) to describe the impact contents generated both by DMOs and by tourists themselves have on a hierarchical chain of effects based on a multidimensional customer-based destination brand equity construct, and (ii) to show how management of these processes impacts the development of brand engagement with the destination itself. To this end, this empirical study takes Peru – an example of an emerging economy – and, more specifically, Metropolitan Lima, an emerging destination, as its reference. More details about these profiles are included in Section 3.

Section 2 provides a review of the literature for the concept of customer-based destination brand equity, together with a set of research hypotheses relating to social media communication's potential impact on destination brand equity and brand engagement with the tourist destination. Following the presentation of methodology and results, the final section of the paper provides a theoretical discussion, key recommendations for management, and conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Customer-based destination brand equity

Since the 1990s, brand equity has been in the research spotlight (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Simon & Sullivan, 1993), with special attention being paid to the impact of operational marketing actions that generate added value (Russell & Kamakura, 1994). As these pioneering studies evolved, brand equity was approached from the perspective of the client, under the assumption that brands are only relevant insofar as customers perceive them as such (Kim, Jin-Sun, & Kim, 2008). What has come to be termed customer-based brand equity (CBBE) continues to be a focal point in hospitality (e.g. Liu, Wong, Tseng, Chang, & Phau, 2017; Sarker, Mohd-Any, & Kamarulzaman, 2019; Seric, Gil-Saura, & Mollá-Descals, 2016) and particularly, in tourist destinations (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Frías et al., 2018; Herrero et al., 2017; Liu & Chou, 2016; Wong & Teoh, 2015). In this regard, tourist perceptions with respect to destination

brand equity play a major role both in terms of tourist destination characteristics and segmentation as well as in boosting tourist loyalty and the revenue the industry derives from this loyalty (Hornig, Liu, Chou & Tsai, 2013).

The literature has given rise to a range of definitions for CBBE and also to different multidimensional structures aimed at illustrating the overall meaning of the construct and its adaptation to tourist destination perceptions. Studies in this vein – abundant in the last decade – argue there is an ongoing need for analysis of CBBE creation and intensity to overcome the discrepancies that have surfaced (e.g. Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006; Zavattaro, Daspit, & Adams, 2015). This call for research is particularly timely and relevant in cases where the destination is conceived as a brand from the perspective of CBBE (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Gómez, López, & Molina, 2015; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). From the consumer's perspective, the destination brand concept has been used similarly to the term destination image (Prebensen, 2007) or place branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006), and customer-based destination brand equity (CDBBE), understood as tourist perceptions driving loyalty to the destination, serving as motivation for the trip (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011), and not limited to the destination image alone (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010).

The majority of studies measuring CDBBE performance propose a multidimensional structure based on Aaker's (1991, 1996) seminal proposals on CBBE and Keller (1993). Aaker argues that brand equity is the set of assets adding or taking value away from the customer. In other words, consumers will perceive the brand as adding value to the product when associating a product with a brand. Aaker (1991) concludes that, while multiple aspects are involved in generating this kind of brand-driven added value, factors such as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations (known as brand image), as well as the intention to pay a higher price for a given brand, can generate brand loyalty and indicate successful brand management. Keller (1993, p.2), on the other hand, approaches CBBE as a process occurring "when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory", combining cognitive aspects (beliefs) and affective attributes (feelings).

Based on Keller's (1993) proposal, the literature analyzing tourist perceptions of destination brand equity has proposed three types of studies: models proposing global measurement of CBBE as a global higher-order construct comprising the dimensions of brand equity (e.g. Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Wong & Teoh, 2015) or analyzing the impact of these dimensions (e.g. Gómez, Fernández, Molina, & Aranda, 2018; Im et al., 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014); models analyzing the antecedents and impact on global measurement of destination brand equity or on any of its dimensions (e.g. Chi, Huang, & Nguyen, 2020; Dedeoglu, Taheri, Okumus, & Gannon, 2020; Liu & Chou, 2016; Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015; Rodríguez-Molina, Frías, Del Barrio-García, & Castañeda-García, 2019); and studies proposing hierarchical relationships between destination brand equity dimensions (e.g. Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2017). In response to the challenges posed in the most recent literature, this study proposes a hierarchical structure of relations between the most notable dimensions of CBBE, coupled with an analysis of the role of communication as an antecedent to these factors, and shows how perceptions regarding destination brand equity can impact vital consequences like brand engagement.

One of the most thoroughly analyzed CDBBE dimensions is destination brand image (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Pike & Bianchi, 2016) identified as one of the main factors influencing perception of destination brand equity. Despite a general lack of consensus regarding how to define brand image (Gómez et al., 2015), there is some agreement to conceptualize the concept at the consumer level, based on customer perceptions and their interpretation.

At the destination level, Cai (2002, p. 723) understands destination brand image as "perceptions about the place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory", combining affective and cognitive structures (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gómez et al., 2015). Proper assessment of destination brand image can have a significant, positive impact on tourist behavior: recommending the destination or returning for a visit down the road, for example. However, as Pike and Bianchi (2016) point out, there is no clear consensus regarding construct measurement. The present study, in line with Boo et al. (2009) and Gómez et al. (2015), will limit destination brand image to the tourist-based social and self-image component, combining beliefs and feelings.

Brand awareness is another key dimension widely used in global measurement of CBBE in hospitality (Liu et al., 2017; Seric et al., 2016), specifically, in the tourist destination context (e.g. Boo et al., 2009; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike & Bianchi, 2016). Most studies on the concept propose a hierarchical relationship between the defining dimensions of CBDBE. Brand awareness emerges once tourists have initiated the learning process and acquired knowledge about the brand. Given its similarity to brand image, the literature shows how destination brand awareness is related to both destination image (Herrero et al., 2017) and destination brand association (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). Other authors, however, propose different relationships in their hierarchical structure, only pointing toward the impact of destination brand awareness on destination brand loyalty (Bianchi et al., 2014; Im et al., 2012), and CBDBE (Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2018).

A well-known brand can be perceived as offering good or bad quality (Im et al., 2012). While DMOs usually consider that they offer high-quality products and services, it is not common to gauge tourist perceptions with regard to destination brand quality: DMOs tend to take into account perceived quality instead (Zavattaro et al., 2015). This may be because brand quality and customer perceived quality are often used as synonyms (Pike & Bianchi, 2016). Perceived quality is defined as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). This global consumer judgment regarding the destination brand is based both on associations with said brand and brand strength (Aaker, 1996), in reference to perceived quality of the facilities and intangible aspects of tourist destinations (Boo et al., 2009; Lassar et al., 1995). In this sense, Low and Lamb (2000) argue the importance of quality, both in the creation of strong brands and destination selection.

Although the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty has been widely demonstrated in the consumer behavior and service marketing literature, gaps still exist in terms of understanding how management of perceived brand quality builds brand loyalty from an attitudinal perspective (Zavattaro et al., 2015). Given the tourism context of this study, measuring the attitudinal dimension of the destination brand is more appropriate than looking at visit repetition (behavioral component of loyalty). Destination brand loyalty refers to the intent to visit and recommend (Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Im et al., 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Pike & Bianchi, 2016).

The previous arguments highlight the multidimensional nature of CBDBE and the existence of certain discrepancies, both in the approach to the dimensions and the hierarchical relations between them. Given this situation, and based on the seminal work of Aaker (1991), this paper proposes to analyze a chain of relationships between the dimensions of CBDBE, such as destination awareness, destination image, perceived destination quality and destination loyalty, with a view to determine how CBDBE is affected by social media communication and, in turn, how it impacts destination brand engagement.

## 2.2. Impact of social media communication on destination brand equity

Recent studies have focused on social network-generated communication content, with emphasis on the role of Web 2.0 (de Rosa et al., 2019; Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2016; Marine-Roig & Ferrer-Rosell, 2018).

These two-way technologies allow for new forms of interaction, providing opportunities for communicating products and services and disseminating information virally via the Internet – hence, influencing consumer perceptions regarding brands – gathering knowledge about target audiences (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015) and boosting consumer loyalty. Likewise, the social web allows users to create and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), making for a more reliable form of communication (Karakaya & Barnes, 2010). All considered, social network technology generates multiple benefits driving positive perception of the brand, making it paramount to encourage research aimed at guiding digital marketers (Hudson et al., 2016) and, more specifically, DMOs (Mistilis et al., 2014; Shao et al., 2016).

To date, there has been little research on the impact of company-generated social media communications on CBBE (Godey et al., 2016; Pike & Bianchi, 2016), with some notable exceptions focusing on the effect of integrated marketing communications in hospitality (Seric, 2017; Seric & Gil, 2012) and tourism destination contexts (de Rosa et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). Moreover, DMO use of Web 2.0 applications during tourist stays is clearly insufficient (Shao et al., 2016). Social media channels provide innumerable opportunities for companies to build relationships with customers via online social network communities (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010), transforming the impact of such channels on CBBE. Company-generated communication content encompasses several approaches and the impact will depend on message sentiment, customer response and the innate disposition of consumers towards social media (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janaliraman, & Kannan, 2016). In this vein, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer (2012) establish that while traditional media has a greater impact on brand awareness, social web communication will have a greater influence on brand image. Hence, it is important to understand how consumers assimilate all of the messages they receive via different communication channels and how they respond in terms of brand equity perception. Rodríguez-Molina (2019). Godey et al. (2016) demonstrate how social media-based marketing efforts have a direct, significant, positive impact on brand awareness and brand image as metrics for CBBE. These arguments have been shored up as well by recent studies focused on the tourist destination. Dedeoglu et al. (2020) analyze the impact of social media on destination brand awareness, concluding that organizations should invest in this kind of communication with a view to grow and enhance their knowledge of potential consumers. Along these lines, Stojanovic, Andreu, and Currás-Pérez (2018) confirm the significant relationship linking intensity of communication and the brand by way of social media-driven awareness when choosing a travel destination.

Hence, based on the fundamentals of marketing and brand communication – and in the quest to explain how tourists assimilate information – this paper proposes that positive perception of DMO-generated social media content has a significant, positive impact on these two key dimensions of CBDBE:

**H1.** DMO-generated social media communication exerts a significant, positive impact on tourist perception of destination awareness (H<sub>1a</sub>) and destination image (H<sub>1b</sub>).

From a business practice perspective, the possibilities generated by tourists themselves via social media is recognized (Dedeoglu et al., 2020; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). There is a large volume of literature analyzing – in tourism marketing contexts and from the perspective of the client – the impact of user-generated content (UGC) and online word-of-mouth (eWOM) on final travel plans (Black & Kelley, 2009; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). Research looking at the impact of eWOM on destination decisions is scarce, however (Sicilia, Pérez, & Heffernan, 2008). Several authors point out that customer dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth (NWOM) affect reputation because clients express disappointment triggered by poor-quality care or lack of compliance with corporate commitments (Chang, Wong, Wang, & Cho, 2015; Dixit, Badgaiyan, & Khare, 2019). Complaints and



claims made via eWOM can generate high-magnitude reputational impact and fatal consequences for CBBE. The probability of a reputational fracture occurring has risen, then, due to the existence of new communication channels (Ji, Li, North, & Liu, 2017).

That said, companies should make the most of social media analysis tools to better understand the inherent dynamism of user-generated content (UGC) and to determine what information is important to their customers (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). In short, UGC's potential to transmit favorable opinions and positively impact brand equity should not be overlooked (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). This argument has been tested in several studies analyzing the impact of tourist-generated social media content on CBBE dimensions. While Lodrà-Riera et al. (2015) argue that tourist-generated content significantly influences how destination image is constructed, more recent studies make the case that UGC has an impact on destination awareness (e.g. Dedeoglu et al., 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018).

Hence, the influence user-generated social media communication exerts on CBDBE does not take into account the potential for organizational control (Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011); companies are equipped to exert powerful, persuasive influence over CBBE (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015) with some degree of ease and vigor (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wierts, 2013). In this light, the second hypothesis of this study is:

**H2.** Tourist-generated social media communication exerts a significant, positive impact on tourist perception of destination awareness (H<sub>2a</sub>) and destination image (H<sub>2b</sub>).

Destination awareness and destination image dimensions are the foundation of our hierarchical stages proposal, as tourists will evaluate destination brand equity by way of several factors – destination quality, value and loyalty – and compare their perceptions with the mental associations they hold with respect to said destination (Dedeoglu et al., 2019). In most CBDEB modeling, both dimensions have been proposed at the same level, as antecedents to other key factors (e.g. Bianchi et al., 2014; Boo et al., 2019; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Im et al., 2012), seen as fostering tourist loyalty and, therefore, enhancing tourism and hospitality sector business outcomes (Kim et al., 2008).

From the associative network model standpoint, destination awareness can be understood as the strength of the bond with the destination brand node in the mind of tourists (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). If Aaker's (1996) proposal is applied, this translates as tourists' ability to recognize and remember given destinations (Gómez et al., 2015). Greater brand reputation/awareness is expected to have a positive impact on consumer quality perceptions (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). This relationship has been widely analyzed in the context of consumer goods, as brand awareness favors confidence in the product, reducing uncertainty and perceived risk. That said, the literature on the relationship linking destination awareness/perceived quality and destination is very scarce to date, as Herrero et al. (2017) note. Pike, Bianchi, Kerr and Patti (2010) contrast how brand salience – understood as degree of destination awareness – has a significant impact on perceptions of destination quality.

From a cognitive standpoint, destination image refers to tourist beliefs regarding the functional characteristics they find attractive (Horng, Liu, Chou, Yin, & Tsai, 2013). In other words, when tourists hold a positive image of a destination, they are expected to associate it with positive expectations regarding quality, which will be contrasted with their combined perceptions of products, services and experiences. However, as Konecnik and Gartner (2007) point out, despite the key role perceived quality plays in global destination assessment—and the significant impact such perceptions have on future tourist behavior; much of the CBDBE literature fails to contemplate this variable due to the operational hurdles destination quality presents.

Based on the above arguments, following hypotheses are proposed as the starting point for the chain of effects linking CBDEB dimensions:

**H3.** Destination awareness by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality.

**H4.** Destination image perceived by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality.

The positive impact perceptions of quality have on brand loyalty has been tested extensively in the service marketing literature, especially in the context of hospitality (Liu et al., 2017). With respect to tourist destinations, quality refers to perceptions regarding the quality of attributes such as infrastructure, accommodation, cleaning and security (Bianchi et al., 2014). Such perceptions play a fundamental role, due to their impact on tourist behavior (Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013), equipping DMOs with entry barriers with which to block new competitors (Zavattaro et al., 2015). If destination-quality perceptions are understood as tourists' global assessment of the product, it seems appropriate to assume a positive relationship between destination quality and destination loyalty (Bianchi et al., 2014; Herrero et al., 2017). Hence, the fifth research hypothesis is:

**H5.** Perceived destination quality by the tourist exerts a significant, positive impact on loyalty towards destination.

### 2.3. Impact of brand equity on brand engagement with destination

Customer engagement (CE) is defined as "customers' behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers" (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254). According to Thakur (2018), engagement is a mental state indicating frequent customer interaction with, and a degree of commitment to, the focal object (i.e. brand or company). Engagement drives relationships beyond transactions (Kumar & Nayak, 2018); in fact, the literature indicates that CE helps build robust long-term relationships and has an impact on outcomes beyond repurchase, including posting of 'likes' and reviews online, and co-creation of products and services (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). Hence, CE allows us to explain interactive consumer-brand relationships (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, and Morgan (2014) adopt a broad vision of CE, integrating conscious attention, enthusiastic participation and social connection, all of which are driven and determined by the degree to which customer relationships, in our case with the tourist destination, are positive.

The term brand engagement (BE) arises in direct connection to the concept of customer engagement (Dwivedi, 2015). Vivek et al. (2014) define BE as level of interaction and connections between consumers and the brand. Brand engagement has evolved as the new brand relationship variable (Dwivedi, 2015; Raies, Mühlbacher, & Gavard-Perret, 2015). As authors such as Kumar and Nayak (2018), Wong and Merrilees (2015) or Dwivedi (2015) indicate, BE acts as a channel through which customers develop passion and involvement with the brand, build commitment towards the brand relationship, and incorporate individual disposition in relation to the brand.

CE comprises a set of brand-related interactions beyond financial transactions (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017; Hollebeek, 2011) involving sharing and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and feelings about experiences with the brand with other customers of the brand (Ahn & Back, 2018; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012); normally as a result of positive experiences (Raies et al., 2015; van Doorn et al., 2010). In this sense, an understanding of how customer experiences and perceived quality serve as a catalyst for high customer engagement – hence, better business outcomes – is essential (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Thakur, 2016). Post-choice evaluative judgments rooted in a global evaluation of all aspects that constitute customer relationships (Homburg & Giering, 2001) with tourist destinations – and their experiences while there – will drive perceived quality levels (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007); hence, tourists will feel more closely connected to the destinations in question (Ahn & Back,

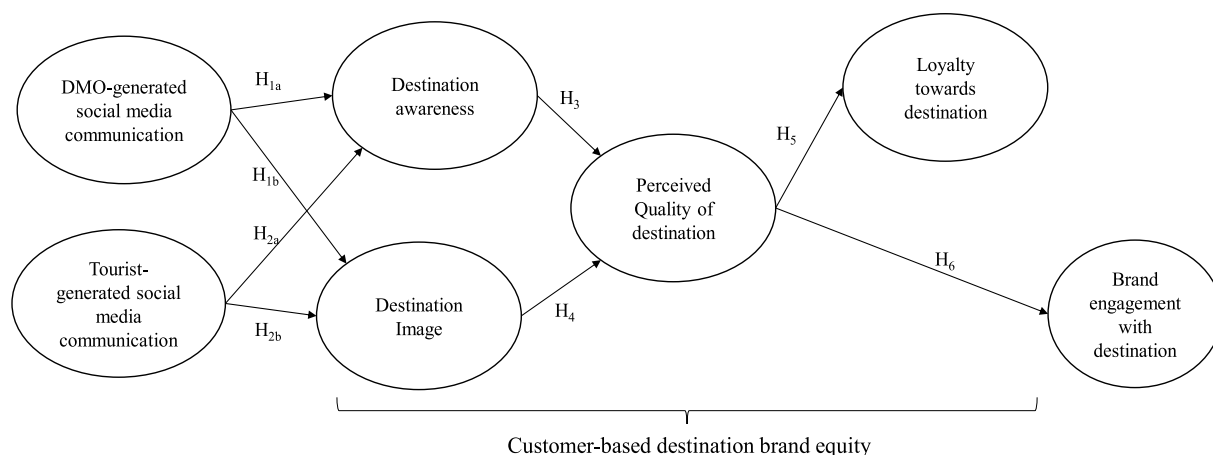


Fig. 1. Proposed theoretical model.

2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015).

Given the strength of these arguments, the last hypothesis in the reference model is:

**H6.** Perceived quality of destination exerts a significant, positive impact on destination brand engagement.

Fig. 1 shows the relationships proposed in the above hypotheses, taking the established hierarchical relationships structure of CBDBE into account.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Peru and Metropolitan Lima

Empirical research was carried out in Metropolitan Lima (Peru), an emerging tourism destination context. Peru has been classified as an emerging economy according to the annual *Morgan Stanley Capital International-MSCI, 2019* ranking based on the most important stock indexes (2019). Table 1 shows a comparison between some countries in terms of Income p/capita and Human Development Index (HDI). According to International Monetary Fund (2017) Peru shows an income p/capita of \$6199 and ranks 87th in the world. More, according to UN HDI rankings for 2018, USA's economy ranks 7th in the world (HDI = 0.924); Peru's economy ranks a distant 89th (HDI = 0.750).

In its annual study, the *World Travel & Tourism Council, (2018)* published key projected figures for Latin America: indicating that "the direct contribution of the Travel and Tourism sector to the GDP of the region was very relevant in 2017 (127.4 billion USD, upwards of 3%), predicting an increase of 3.4% in 2018, and that the trend will likely continue at least through 2028". In such a context, the evolution of key tourism-sector benchmarks allows us to consider Peru, in general, and Lima in particular, as an emerging tourist destination: above and

Table 1  
Country comparisons<sup>a</sup>.

Country	Income p/capita (ranking)	HDI (ranking)
USA	59,501 \$ (7)	0.924 (13)
Canada	45,077 \$ (17)	0.926 (12)
Germany	44,550 \$ (18)	0.936 (5)
Spain	28,359 \$ (31)	0.891 (26)
Hong-Kong	46,109 \$ (15)	0.933 (7)
India	1983 \$ (142)	0.640 (130)
Peru	6199 \$ (87)	0.750 (89)

<sup>a</sup> Per capita income figures are based on data from the International Monetary Fund (2017); HDI is based on data from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018).

Table 2

Evolution of tourism in Peru.

Source: MINCETUR and Banco Central de Reserva del Perú (2019).

	2008	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nº hotels (in thousands)	11.4	18.1	19.5	20.6	21.6	22.1
Nº rooms (in thousands)	176.8	245.3	260.0	271.8	287.2	296.8
Nº available beds (in thousands)	310.3	425.6	451.5	472.3	498.9	516.2
Nº visitors (in millions)	24.8	46.4	47.9	50.6	51.9	55.4
Nº overnight stays (in millions)	34.2	64.2	65.3	69.5	70.5	73.8
Nº international tourists (in millions)	2.1	3.2	3.5	3.7	4.0	4.4
Income from inbound tourism (in millions USD)	2396	3907	4140	4288	4574	4895

beyond Machu Pichu as a consolidated international tourism destination.

Table 2 indicates the evolution of the number of hotels, hotel rooms and available beds over the past five years in Peru, according to Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (MINCETUR (2019)) figures for 2019. Moreover, according to the same agency, both the number of visitors and overnight stays exhibit ongoing sustainable growth: particularly in comparison with the data from 10 years ago. Moreover, the number of international tourists has increased throughout: according to data from MINCETUR (2019) the number has gone from 2.1 million tourists, in 2008, to 3.2 million, in 2014, and as high as 4.4 million in 2018. These figures explain the growth in inbound tourism revenue in Peru: going from US\$2396 million, in 2008, to US\$3907 million, in 2014, and US\$4895 million in 2018, according to data from the Peruvian Central Reserve Bank.

In this context, Lima has played a leading role. According to data from the *World Travel & Tourism Council, (WTTC, 2018)*, Lima is the preeminent travel and tourism destination in Peru. The same agency reports close to 90% of foreign visitors spend at least one night in the Peruvian capital: Lima being gateway to an array of tourist destinations across the country given that the vast majority of international travelers go through Jorge Chavez Airport, major long-haul flight hub for the region. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show the evolution in a series of key figures over the last five years, positioning Lima as an emerging destination in clear expansion: number of international arrivals at Jorge Chavez airport, available room capacity and number of visitors to main city monuments. These figures follow the same trend at other major Peruvian airports, i.e. Cusco and Nasca, and principal cities, e.g. Cusco, Ica-Nasca, Loreto, Arequipa, Ayacucho and Cajamarca.

Thus, in general terms, Lima is a catalyst for the thriving Peruvian tourism industry, ranking third among South American cities in terms of travel industry revenue/volume, only trailing Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. All of the above has a positive impact on regional

**Table 3.1**  
Evolution of tourism figures in Metropolitan Lima.  
Source: MINCETUR (2019).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nº international travelers (Jorge Chávez Aeropuerto)	1,800,434	1,889,512	2,014,762	2,176,025	2,337,893
Nº available rooms	68,386	69,634	69,668	71,417	72,538

**Table 3.2**  
Evolution in number of visitors: main Lima monuments.  
Source: MINCETUR (2019).

	2016	2017	2018
National Museum of Archeology	162,271	205,134	219,275
Huaca Pucllana	116,754	139,647	168,460

economic figures and justifies research interest in the region, presenting an attractive profile of emerging tourist destination in an emerging economy context.

3.2. Procedure

Information was collected through a structured questionnaire written in English and Spanish. The survey was developed by adapting a set of previously selected scales which had been previously tested in the literature (Appendix 1). Each item was measured using a seven-point Likert scale where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘7’ means ‘strongly agree’. Before carrying out the fieldwork, a pre-test was given to five expert Spanish and British scholars and 10 tourists of both nationalities to verify that the questionnaire was easily understood. In line with pre-test results, some survey statements were modified in order to improve the functionality and adapt the questionnaire to the study context.

The method for collecting information was determined by simple

**Table 4**  
Measurement model estimation (dimensionality, consistency and validity).

Construct	Items	SL (t-value)	R <sup>2</sup>	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
DMO-generated social media communication	DCC1	0.895	0.801	0.950	0.950	0.825
	DCC 2	0.897** (32.49)	0.805			
	DCC 3	0.919** (28.30)	0.844			
	DCC 4	0.922** (24.06)	0.851			
Tourist-generated social media communication	UGC1	0.871	0.759	0.933	0.935	0.783
	UGC 2	0.914** (19.31)	0.835			
	UGC 3	0.911** (24.09)	0.831			
	UGC 4	0.841** (22.06)	0.707			
Destination awareness	DAW1	0.733	0.537	0.866	0.873	0.698
	DAW 2	0.921** (16.59)	0.848			
	DAW 3	0.842** (14.49)	0.709			
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1	0.883	0.780	0.896	0.897	0.744
	PQD2	0.875** (18.88)	0.766			
	PQD3	0.828** (12.42)	0.686			
Destination image	DIM1	0.889	0.790	0.927	0.929	0.766
	DIM2	0.905** (26.02)	0.820			
	DIM3	0.890** (23.69)	0.792			
	DIM4	0.813** (13.92)	0.660			
Loyalty towards destination	DLO1	0.869	0.755	0.882	0.885	0.660
	DLO2	0.873** (24.23)	0.762			
	DLO3	0.721** (17.46)	0.519			
	DLO4	0.776** (17.56)	0.602			
Brand engagement with destination	BED1	0.832	0.691	0.894	0.896	0.591
	BED2	0.869** (20.97)	0.755			
	BED3	0.759** (13.68)	0.576			
	BED4	0.766** (18.46)	0.587			
	BED5	0.694** (14.95)	0.482			
	BED6	0.672** (12.67)	0.452			

SL = Standardized loadings; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Fit indices: Chi<sup>2</sup><sub>Sat-Bt</sub> (df = 329) = 561.05\*\*, Chi<sup>2</sup><sub>Sat-Bt</sub>/df = 1.71; RMSEA = 0.049; CFI = 0.959; GFI = 0.815; BB-NFI = 0.909; BB-NNFI = 0.953.

\*\*Statistical significance at 99%.

random selection of guests staying in three-, four- and five-star hotels in Metropolitan Lima. Prior to commencing fieldwork, permission was requested from area hotels; thirty-eight agreed to participate. The questionnaire was self-administered by trained interviewers in hotel lobbies during mornings and evenings. Fieldwork was carried out between June and October 2018. The final sample comprises 300 tourists, with a sampling error of 0.058 for intermediate proportions (p = q = 0.5), and infinite population. Sample distribution is compensated by gender (52.3% men; 47.7% women), and age (47% under 35 years of age; 53% over 35 years old). 25% of the sample indicated it was the first time they had visited the destination, while 39.6% indicated it was their second visit. With regard to the type of trip, 84.7% indicated their main purpose was leisure/holidays, while the rest (15.3%) reported they were travelling for business/work.

Statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and EQS6.2 software to test research hypotheses: in line with Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, (2013). Measurement scale dimensionality and reliability were verified via EFA/CFA factor analysis. Correlation between latent constructs was verified to assess a potential higher order between CBDBE, following guidelines by Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). Internal consistency was assessed via the composite reliability and variance extracted indices for each measurement model. Likewise, both convergent and discriminant scale validity and potential common bias problems were addressed. Finally, the hypotheses were verified through structural equation model estimation.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Measurement scale dimensionality, reliability and validity

An initial approach to measurement scale dimensionality was carried out by means of an exploratory factorial analysis (EFA), applying the auto-value retention criterion superior to the unit and Varimax rotation. The results showed the dimensional structure proposed for measurement of the CBDDBE construct, based on the contributions proposed by Boo et al. (2009) and Yoo and Donthu (2001). The measurements of antecedents to CBDDBE (DMO-generated and tourist-generated social media communication) and its consequence (brand engagement) will load to its corresponding latent factor, and turn out to be one-dimensional. Regarding refinement of the measurement scales, two items relating to the measurement of perception of service quality were eliminated because they presented a load under 0.6 (Hair et al., 2013). The results indicate that all dimensions reach optimal levels of reliability, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  indexes above 0.85 (Table 4).

Based on the exploratory dimensionality study, a first-order measurement model was estimated using EQS 6.2 software. In view of the lack of normal multivariate data distribution, the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation method was used. Fit indices for the model were satisfactory ( $\chi^2_{\text{Sat-Bt}}/\text{df} = 1.71$ ; CFI = 0.959; RMSEA = 0.049), indicating a good estimate in the proposed chain of relationships. As evidenced in the theoretical framework, there is a degree of discrepancy regarding the dimensional nature of the CBDDBE construct: a number of studies employ global measurements (Im et al., 2012; Liu & Chou, 2016; Wong & Teoh, 2015); other authors treat CBDDBE as a first-order construct (Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2017; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014), and still others consider CBDDBE as a higher-order construct (Frías et al., 2018; Gómez et al., 2015; Wong & Teoh, 2015). Faced with this duality, the analysis of CBDDBE multidimensionality delved deeper by estimating a higher-order measurement model regarding CBDDBE as a second-order latent factor. Comparing both models, results obtained from the  $\chi^2$  difference test show that the higher-order estimate ( $\chi^2_{\text{Sat-Bt}}/\text{df} = 2.14$ ; GFI = 0.772; CFI = 0.934; RMSEA = 0.062) is significantly worse at 99% ( $\Delta\chi^2$  (df = 11) = 275.93; p-value < 0.0001).

With regard to internal consistency of the constructs (Table 4), the composite reliability indices were all above the minimum recommended level of 0.7 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988); variance extracted values also exceeded the minimum recommended level of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In the next stage, measurement scale validity was assessed. Convergent validity is contrasted, since all loading factors were significant and above 0.6 (Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991), as shown in Table 4. With regard to discriminant validity, the correlations between each pair of latent constructs were lower than the square root of AVE (Table 5). Moreover, discriminant validity was confirmed via the  $\chi^2$  difference test, comparing model estimation by restricting correlations to the unit and the unrestricted model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Results for the  $\Delta\chi^2$  (df = 21) = 566.05 statistic were at 99% (p-

**Table 5**  
Discriminant validity (descriptive statistics and correlations between factors).

	Mean	SD	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
F1. DMO-generated social media communication	5.40	1.20	<b>0.908</b>						
F2. Tourist-generated media communication	5.39	1.20	0.801	<b>0.885</b>					
F3. Destination awareness	6.00	0.97	0.470	0.503	<b>0.835</b>				
F4. Perceived quality of destination	6.16	0.87	0.492	0.582	0.774	<b>0.862</b>			
F5. Destination image	5.54	1.26	0.591	0.640	0.461	0.693	<b>0.875</b>		
F6. Loyalty towards destination	4.93	1.53	0.632	0.653	0.382	0.497	0.747	<b>0.812</b>	
F7. Brand engagement	5.64	0.95	0.596	0.630	0.565	0.665	0.712	0.716	<b>0.768</b>

SD: Standard deviation.

The elements on the main diagonal are the square root of the AVE.

value < 0.0001), allowing it to be affirmed that each scale represents notably different concepts.

Lastly, given that the same tourist had to simultaneously assess both the endogenous variables (CBDDBE and Brand Engagement dimensions) and the exogenous variables for the model (two dimensions of social media communication), potential common bias problems were checked for. To this end, following guidelines in Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), Harman's single factor test was used to estimate a measurement model where all observable variables loaded to a single latent factor. Adjustment indices for this estimate ( $\chi^2_{\text{Sat-Bt}}/\text{df} = 5.99$ ; GFI = 0.444; CFI = 0.697; RMSEA = 0.130) were significantly worse at 99% (p-value < 0.0001) when compared with the model pondering seven latent factors ( $\Delta\chi^2$  (df = 21) = 1150.56). Moreover, none of the correlations between latent constructs shown in Table 5 are above 0.9 (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991).

##### 4.2. Structural model estimation

A structural equations model was estimated in order to contrast the research hypotheses. The two social media communication dimensions exert different degrees of impact on CBDDBE dimensions (Fig. 2). While all relationships are positive and significant, our data indicates that tourist-generated communication has a stronger impact on destination awareness ( $\gamma = 0.354^{**}$ ) and image ( $\gamma = 0.483^{**}$ ) than DMO-generated social media ( $\gamma = 0.202^+$  and  $\gamma = 0.209^+$ ). These results confirm H1 and H2.

With regard to the impact of the chain of effects linking CBDEB dimensions, destination awareness ( $\beta = 0.501^{**}$ ) and image ( $\beta = 0.531^{**}$ ) exhibit a significant, positive impact on perceived destination quality; hence H3 and H4 can be confirmed. The results also support H5, as perceived destination quality has a significant impact on destination loyalty ( $\beta = 0.799^{**}$ ).

Finally, it was proposed that CBDEB has an impact on brand destination engagement by way of perceived destination quality (H6). The findings show this relationship to be significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.812^{**}$ ), confirming our final hypothesis.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusions

##### 5.1. Overview

The impact of the social web in business management in general – and in a sector as competitive as tourism in particular – is unquestionable; social web technology has revolutionized the way we conceive of and manage company-client relationships. Moreover, social networks together with search and comparison platforms have completely transformed existing competitive norms. As the literature suggests (e.g. Horn et al., 2015; Shao et al., 2016) this phenomenon not only provides companies with access to global markets, but empowers consumers as well. Tourists now have a wide range of information regarding availability, characteristics and accommodation prices at their fingertips: —complemented by a treasure trove of fellow tourists' opinions



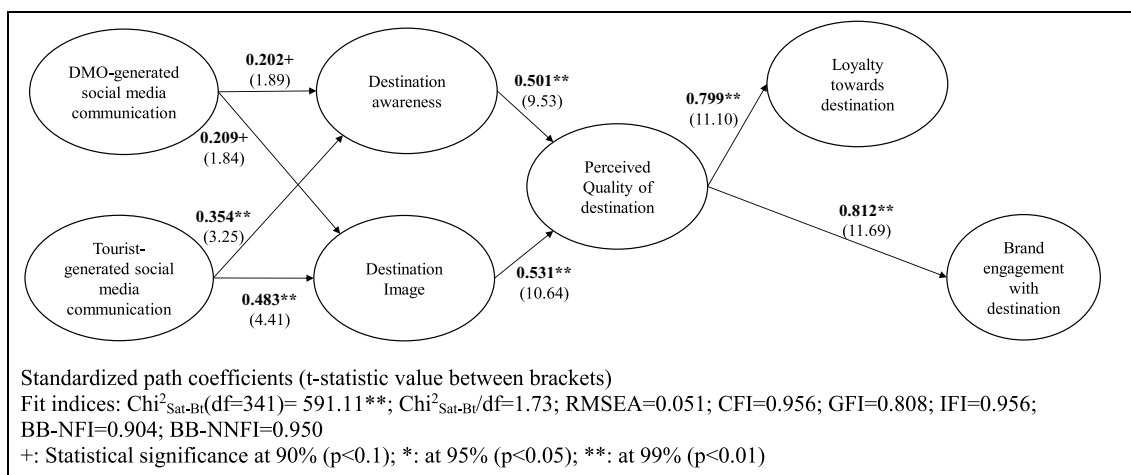


Fig. 2. Structural equation model (SEM) estimation, Standardized path coefficients (t-statistic value between brackets), Fit indices:  $\chi^2_{\text{Sat-Bt}}(\text{df} = 341) = 591.11^{**}$ ;  $\chi^2_{\text{Sat-Bt}}/\text{df} = 1.73$ ; RMSEA = 0.051; CFI = 0.956; GFI = 0.808; IFI = 0.956; , BB-NFI = 0.904; BB-NNFI = 0.950, + : Statistical significance at 90% ( $p < 0.1$ ); \* : at 95% ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\* : at 99% ( $p < 0.01$ ).

regarding their perceptions and experiences with the destination or establishment in question. This means that companies no longer the sole source of information impacting brand positioning and potential consumer behavior; a powerful new communication channel has come onto the scene – not contracted or controlled, a priori, by the company – connecting consumers from all over the world and exerting an enormous impact on final decisions. Moreover, the literature indicates that information received via social media channels garners a higher level of confidence among consumers, as it is not company-sponsored or controlled (e.g. Gartner, 1993; Karakaya & Barnes, 2010; Litvin, Goldmith, & Pan, 2008).

From a brand management perspective, Aaker's and Keller's models highlight the importance of aspects other than knowledge: such as strength, uniqueness and favorable disposition towards the brand. In the specific case of the tourism destination brand equity, management of certain tangible elements helps shape destination brand image: the quality consumers perceive and communicate through different channels and verification of certain degrees of destination loyalty can be understood as brand equity-related factors (Bianchi et al., 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). As previously mentioned, the results aimed to contribute to the current debate about the perception of the CBDDE, confirming the hierarchical structure of relations among its most significant dimensions in line with recent investigations (e.g. Bianchi et al., 2014; Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2017). Finally, as authors such as Vivek et al., 2012 and van Doorn et al. (2010) point out, consumers tend to feel more connected with the brand when they perceive positive relationship outcomes. In tourism contexts, therefore, expect brand equity can be expected to exert a positive impact on customer engagement (Ahn & Back, 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Hudson et al., 2015).

This phenomenon – which until now has only been studied in developed economy contexts – translates as enormous potential opportunity for emerging economy and/or emerging tourist destinations. The advent and spread of communication tools, delivering access to global markets at a reasonable cost – coupled with adequate management of factors driving brand equity – facilitate worldwide positioning of a destination, and potential creation of an engine for economic development. It is essential, therefore, to adopt a coordinated approach to working at the destination level i.e. integrated communication management. Ensuring consistency between the products/services on offer and user perceptions of those products/services is, then, a key objective in effective brand management: as only then will company-generated communication match and complement customer UGC.

### 5.2. Theoretical contribution

This research presents a unique aspect: namely, looking at controlled and uncontrolled communication – both separately and jointly, from the tourist's standpoint – in destination brand equity contexts. Controlled communication characterizes the conventional profile of this marketing variable; traditionally, companies determine the mix of investment, platform and channels with which they will interact with the market (Taruté & Gatautis, 2001). Hence, a positive relationship can be expected linking tourist perceptions of controlled communication and CBDDE dimensions. The data corroborate this idea. Specifically, uncontrolled communication empowers customers with the ability to communicate both positive and negative content: beyond the control of firms (e.g. Camprubí, Guia, & Comas, 2013; Eisingerich et al., 2014; Morra, Ceruti, Chierici, & Di Gregorio, 2018). The results also confirm the impact of this type of communication on CBDDE dimensions.

The present research indicates, therefore, that both types of communication – controlled and uncontrolled – have a significant impact on destination awareness and image. Specifically, our results indicate that organic information sources (either unsolicited or solicited) generated by tourists shows a higher influence on destination image formation than information created by induced agents (DMOs). In line with previous studies (e.g. Beerli & Martín, 2004; Litvin et al., 2008; Morra et al., 2018; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), the findings of this study support Gartner's (1993, p. 210) conclusions, which indicate that the less control exerted over the information generated by the agents, the greater its credibility and influence in the destination image formation. Even so, the discussion is no longer only about controlling channels or messages; companies are also now left at the mercy of tourist opinions. Hence, the significant relationship linking DMO-generated contents and tourists themselves suggests that social media is a key player in terms of creating positive images of the destination.

Moreover, in such a scenario, the degree of tourist satisfaction/dissatisfaction becomes crucial to understanding message profiles. The level of satisfaction determines the tourist's overall destination evaluation, taking into account the products, services, and experiences, where quality is a fundamental element (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Factors such as innovation and comparison with competitors are often recognized (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Dodds et al., 1991). Thus, destination awareness and image – generated largely by created, shared content – have an indirect impact on attitudinal destination loyalty, mediated by perceived destination quality. Another aspect to highlight of the results of this study is the significant influence of the perceived quality of the



destination on loyalty towards the destination as there is a certain degree of discrepancy regarding to this direct effect in extant literature. There are authors who do not contrast this causal relationship (Bianchi et al., 2014), while other authors do (Herrero et al., 2017).

Moreover, brand equity is a driver for successful, effective customer relations management, as Liew (2008), among others, confirm. Cambra-Fierro, Centeno, Olavarría, and Vázquez-Carrasco (2017) and Sin, Tse, and Yim (2005) implicitly suggest that relational strategy success can be measured in terms of customer assessments regarding level of satisfaction, declared loyalty, interest in other products offered by the company and share-of-wallet. Again, the present findings are in line with the literature: we observe that brand equity becomes the antecedent of a series of non-transactional behaviors, grouped under the umbrella concept of brand engagement (i.e. recommendations and co-creation), that have a deferred impact on outcomes (Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, & Sese, 2016; van Doorn et al., 2010).

From a theoretical standpoint, this research proposes a holistic model designed to assess the impact of communication on brand equity. More specifically, it differentiates between company-generated controlled/uncontrolled communication, incorporating the impact of customer perceptions on the perception of ICT-use in communication. Finally, the study confirms that dimensions of brand equity have a direct impact, both on a series of relational attributes (loyalty) and on the degree of customer engagement.

### 5.3. Managerial implications

Based on these results it must, therefore, be suggested that a clear idea of real objectives, capabilities and resources is indispensable; and the most efficient tools must be employed to transmit all types of communication in such a way as to have a positive impact on destination awareness and image. That said, DMOs should define clear strategies for multichannel transmission of traditional, controlled communication; yet they should also look for alternatives aimed at transmitting quality in a credible way. In a context so clearly marked by the impact of social media, encouraging active tourist participation in conveying positive messages about their experience in the destination is of the essence. Therefore, the DMOs can also consider social media as a new opportunity to reach the market and know the tourists opinions about their destination as well as the stories, comments, advises and photos shared by tourists (Camprubí et al., 2013). Technology-based efforts and investment – as proposed in the general models – are essential if emerging economy and other emerging destinations are to be empowered to effectively connect with tourists; in their absence, such destinations will not be provided with developmental support and fledgling economies will continue to flail, widening the gap even further.

From a practical standpoint, it can be seen how nearly all messages issued by consumers tend to assess aspects of this nature: factors which ultimately determine brand equity as perceived by other users before making their own decisions. Hence, given that the data used in this study corroborate these ideas, excellence-based management can be advocated. It must be borne in mind that the tourism sector is a classic case of a service industry and, consequently, that tourism's intangible profile requires a great deal of attention. Enhancing services by making them more tangible through excellence – understood as adapting to tourist expectations – is paramount. To this end, an awareness of exactly what the tourist destination has to offer is recommended, coupled with an understanding of what customers are really looking for in a given destination; quality training for sector professionals – regardless of whether they come into direct contact with the user or not – effective selection and motivation processes aimed at guaranteeing satisfactory tourist interaction and properly managed post-purchase actions, among other strategies, are also essential. Only then can positive experiences, perceptions and evaluations be expected; ones that, in turn, bolster and enhance brand equity. On the contrary, no matter how high the

investment in terms of controlled communication, the message will be inconsistent. This is the shared responsibility of companies and institutions, both of whom must work together, investing in training and ICT, as well as effectively regulating the labor market.

From a practical perspective, this study presents an integrated management model that takes communication and brand equity management into account as fundamental factors in understanding the long-term success of a given tourist destination. It must be remembered the fact that ICT makes managing controlled communication possible; yet the same technology makes monitoring uncontrolled communication feasible as well. Such environments generate huge volumes of information (big data), including consumer profiles, attitudes, tastes, etc, making figures like the community manager decisive, both as a spokesperson and an analyst. Moreover, to the extent that companies are able to satisfy customers and build customer-company bonds, ICT becomes a fundamental tool for facilitating co-creation processes and fostering positive customer-to-customer feedback.

That being said, it is important to highlight the importance of new technologies and uncontrolled communication (organic sources) in consumer-tourist behavior models. Hence, it is essential to accompany investment efforts with the existence of a community manager, in charge of effectively managing both company-customer and customer-company communication flows with a view to identifying and analyzing the most significant trends and events in customer-to-customer communication and better understand the degree of real customer satisfaction, the needs, tastes and expectations of potential tourists, and even to keep tabs on competitor companies/destinations. The community manager profile, then, is proactive rather than reactive: both a spokesperson and an analyst.

### 5.4. Conclusions and further research

This model demonstrates the significance of the proposed relationships; it does not, however, evaluate their possible circular effect, i.e. assess the real impact of relational behaviors on customer perceptions of controlled (e.g. credibility)/uncontrolled communication: to do so would require longitudinal data. This is, perhaps, the study's main limitation: being based on cross-sectional data where some items establishments could be too general. Another interesting line for future research – once the general relationships between reference model variables have been analyzed – would be to analyze the impact on destination awareness and destination image of the social media communication (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc) from autonomous information sources (e.g. Lonely Planet, CNN Travel, National Geographic, etc) in line with recent studies (e.g. de Rosa et al., 2019; Marine-Roig & Ferrer-Rosell, 2018).

Effective management of the variables proposed in this study would help to position certain destinations on the global playing field. The reference hypotheses are based on studies carried out in classical developed, western economy contexts. The proposals, on the contrary, have been tested in an emerging economy context, characterized by certain peculiarities: specifically, the tourist sector in Metropolitan Lima, regarded by many tour operators as the gateway to Peru's hidden treasures (e.g. Machu-Pichu) and a must-see stop on any visit to the Andean country.

This research reveals a clear call to modernize management models, foster professionalism and improve training among many sector employees and boost customer satisfaction ratios. A coordinated, concerted effort, with key elements of this model as a guideline, would help drive hospitality sector development, enhance the Lima brand, help shore up Peru Travel as an umbrella label and contribute to more robust growth throughout the region. Most of the conclusions can be extrapolated to other emerging economies and/or emerging tourist destinations: since when CBDDE is reinforced and tourists engage with the destination, positive outcomes can be expected in terms of competitiveness, internationalization, job creation, education and training,

innovation, and economic development for the region, among other potential benefits.

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### Appendix I. Constructs and item statements

Construct	Statement	References
DMO-generated social media communication	DCC1: I'm satisfied with communication generated by destination organizations in Lima on social networks. DCC 2: The level of communication on social networks and other technologies from destination organizations in Lima meets my expectations. DCC 3: Communication on social networks from destination organizations in Lima is very attractive. DCC 4: Compared to social network communication from other destinations, communication generated by destination organizations in Lima is effective.	Adapted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) and Seric and Gil (2012)
Tourist-generated media communication	UGC1: I'm satisfied with communication generated by other tourists on social networks about Lima as a tourist destination. UGC 2: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks is very attractive. UGC 3: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks provides me with different ideas about this destination. UGC 4: The content generated by other tourists about Lima on social networks helps me formulate ideas about this destination.	Adapted from Bansal and Voyer (2000) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)
Destination awareness	DAW1: I can imagine what Lima is like as a tourist destination. DAW 2: I am aware of Lima. DAW 3: I can recognize Lima as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Arnett, Laverie, and Meiers (2003) and Ferns and Walls (2012)
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1: The quality of lodging in Lima is excellent. PQD2: The quality of infrastructures in Lima is excellent. PQD3: Lima, as a tourist destination, offers consistent quality. PQD4*: <i>The probability of Lima being reliable as a tourist destination is very high.</i> PQD5*: <i>I can expect superior performance with regard to what's on offer in Lima.</i>	Adapted from Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
Destination image	DIM1: I can visualize several characteristics of Lima as a tourist destination. DIM2: Lima is different than other tourist destinations. DIM3: Lima stands out above other tourist destinations. DIM4: I know what Lima is.	Adapted from Yoo et al. (2000)
Loyalty towards destination	DLO1: I would like to revisit in the near future DLO2: I would like to recommend Lima as a tourist destination to friends and acquaintances. DLO3: I would still consider travelling to Lima even if the cost of the trip went up. DLO4: I'm loyal to Lima as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Yoo et al. (2000) and Im et al. (2012)
Brand engagement with destination	BED1: I would like to share my experience in Lima with other tourists. BED2: If I'm asked my opinion, I will recommend Lima without hesitation. BED3: I would always give my honest opinion about Lima as a tourist destination. BED4: I would like to interact with the destination organizations in Lima. BED5: I would participate with the destination organizations in Lima, making suggestions or providing ideas that would improve what they have on offer. BED6: I like to help other tourists to clear up their doubts regarding Lima as a tourist destination.	Adapted from Cambra et al. (2016)

\*Item was deleted following dimensionality analysis.

### Author statement

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