

The mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty

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Abstract

Despite the efforts of organisations to make their consumers loyal to their brands, numerous studies show how loyalty has been declining in recent years without apparent causes. The aim of this research is to study the relationship between personality, trust and brand loyalty, to help understand the role of each of these variables in consumers' relationships with brands. Through a structural model built from data collected from a representative sample of 1,015 individuals, results put forward evidence of an indirect positive influence of brand personality on consumer loyalty, mediated by brand trust. Surprisingly, the results contrast with previous studies and show that there is no direct relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. The results of this study have implications for both researchers and managers because previous research has analysed the direct influence of brand personality on trust or loyalty but not the mediating role that trust has on the relationship between personality and loyalty.

Keywords: Brand trust, Brand personality, Brand loyalty, SEM

1. Introduction

Trust makes consumers satisfied, improves brand image and therefore increases brand loyalty (Huang & Cai, 2015). Building brand trust promotes long-term relationships (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003) triggered by a previously conceived process and considered by consumers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Trust has been widely explained through brand satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009; Molinillo et al., 2019). Additionally, most of the research noted the impact of trust on loyalty (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Lam & Shankar, 2014; Syed Alwi et al., 2016), pointing out that trust is a fundamental driver of loyalty (Flavián et al., 2005). The link between trust and loyalty has been thoroughly studied because retaining loyal customers is more complicated than attracting new ones (Kim & Gupta, 2009) as brand trust leads to repeat purchases and recommendation to future customers (Molinillo et al., 2019).

Research suggests that brand satisfaction is not the only trigger for trust and hence loyalty. Consequently, it is not sufficient to explain brand loyalty completely (Kumar et al., 2013; Oliver, 1999). On this basis, studies that address the mediating role of trust along with other attributes are varied. For instance, trust has been studied as a factor in the indirect relationship between brand association and loyalty (Phan & Ghantous, 2013), Corporate Social Responsibility and loyalty (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018) or brand image and loyalty (Song et al., 2019). Surprisingly, across this wide range of studies on the antecedents of loyalty, the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty has not been studied so extensively (Kim et al., 2001).

There are studies of brand personality that have deepened in their consequences in aspects as wide as brand value, attitude towards the brand, associations or aspects that strengthen the relationship between the brand and the consumers among others (i.e. Coelho et al., 2020; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Keller, 1993; Louis & Lombart, 2010;

Maehle et al., 2011; Molinillo et al., 2017; Sung & Kim, 2010). In addition, there is research that analyses how brand personality influences purchase intention or purchase decision (Gordon et al., 2016; Ha & Janda, 2014). However, studies that have worked exclusively on the effect of brand personality on brand loyalty (i.e Lin, 2010; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014) are scarce and have not taken into consideration the mediating role of brand trust. Louis and Lombart (2010) point out the need for studies to explain the influence of brand personality on loyalty.

Brand personality strengthens the relationship between brands and consumers and influences brand equity (Keller, 1993). As a key concept in relationship marketing (Louis & Lombart, 2010) brand personality involves understanding that brands are associated with human personality traits. Aaker (1997, p. 347), in a seminal paper, defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with brand”. Brand personality has attracted the interest of both academics and professionals because it helps to create differentiation. In addition, it provides an understanding of how to build and maintain consumer-brand relationships over time (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014) and explains how these relationships affect consumer behaviour (Fournier, 1998; Freling & Forbes, 2005). Consequently, this is one of the aspects that should be considered when studying brand loyalty. Kim et al. (2011) found that brand personality has an indirect effect on brand loyalty through positive word-of-mouth, but few studies have specifically included trust as part of this indirect process between personality and loyalty. Thus, the inclusion of trust in brand personality–brand loyalty relationships is relevant.

Considering this context, the study aims to understand the relationship between personality, trust and brand loyalty. The article is a contribution to the research stream of consumer-brand relationships and, in contrast to previous studies that analyse trust or

loyalty as relational consequences of personality (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019), suggests that a brand's personality traits influence trust and trust indirectly influences loyalty. One of the most surprising findings is that brand personality does not have a direct positive effect on brand loyalty. To validate the hypotheses and the proposed conceptual model, data were collected from 1015 individuals selected through stratified random sampling. The scales to measure each of these concepts are the brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997) and its five basic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness; the scale of brand trust (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003) and its dimensions of credibility, integrity and benevolence; and the scale of brand loyalty employed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) to assess loyalty within their proposed scale to measure consumer-based brand equity.

The results show that brand personality has a positive influence on brand trust. Also, trust in brands has a statistically significant influence on brand loyalty. The main novelty of the study is that trust plays a mediating role between personality and brand loyalty. Additionally, the study also shows that there is no direct positive relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. This research is relevant for both academics and professionals. From an academic perspective, it delves into key concepts of relationship marketing and responds to the call (Geuens et al., 2009; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Louis & Lombart, 2010) for further research to explain the effect of brand personality on loyalty and trust. This study also offers a new perspective by analysing the mediating role of trust between personality and loyalty. From a business perspective, results shed light on the development of more effective marketing and communication strategies.

The structure of the article is as follows. The first section develops the theoretical framework, proposes a conceptual model and justifies the hypotheses of the study. The

second section explains the justification of the sample and the method. Subsequently, the results are shown, followed by a discussion and conclusion section.

2. Literature Review

Brand personality implies that consumers associate human personality traits (Aaker et al., 2001). Azoulay and Kapferer defines it as “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands (2003, p. 151). The brand personality is a concept with some critics (Austin et al., 2003; Avis, 2012; Oklevik et al., 2020) but which has mainly attracted the attention of academics and professionals because it creates and strengthens the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Sung & Kim, 2010) as well as impacting on the brand’s image and brand equity (Keller, 1993; Valette-Florence et al., 2011). Aaker (1997) proposes a model with five dimensions – sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness – which has subsequently been used in numerous studies (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013).

Research analyses the positive influence of brand personality in different aspects: brand value (Keller, 1993), brand attitude (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), brand preference (Branaghan & Hildebrand, 2011), brand associations (Freling & Forbes, 2005; Maehle et al., 2011), consumer commitment (Valette-Florence, R. & Valette-Florence, P., 2020), purchase intention and brand choice (Gordon et al., 2016; Ha & Janda, 2014) or brand loyalty (Lin, 2010; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). Given the importance of brand personality in building the relationship between brand and consumer and predicting consumer behaviour (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Gordon et al., 2016, Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2013; Swaminathan et al., 2009) there is a line of research that has focused on analysing what are the main relational consequences of brand personality (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Molinillo et al., 2017; Sung & Kim, 2010). These papers analyse the influence that brand personality has on affect, attachment,

commitment, trust or loyalty, all key concepts to explain the relationship between brand and consumer. Our research analyses two of them: trust and loyalty.

Previous literature shows that trust strengthens long-term relationships between consumers and companies because it implies that the supplier is reliable and can keep its promise (Chiu et al., 2012). Thus, consumers trust the service and are satisfied, the image is improved, and customer-based brand capital is created which increases brand loyalty (Huang & Cai, 2015). As a result, the perception of risk on the purchase is reduced and customers are willing to pay more for the service or product (Nyffenegger et al., 2015). Morgan and Hunt (1994) propose that brand trust leads to brand loyalty because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued for the customer.

Brand trust, therefore, refers to the willingness of a consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to fulfil its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Moorman et al., 1992) and is a key concept in relationship marketing because it is capable of establishing long-term and consistent relationships (Gurviez and Korchia, 2003). In addition, the sense of trust is particularly relevant in situations of uncertainty (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Moorman et al., 1992) because it helps the consumer make decisions based on an "involving process that is well thought out and carefully considered" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). One of the key variables used to analyse trust-building is consumer satisfaction. Satisfaction is a fundamental part of the process of generating trust and, therefore, brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009; Molinillo et al., 2019). Brand satisfaction and its positive relationship with loyalty (Çifci et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2013) have helped to understand the consumer's desire for long-term relationships (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001). However, research proposes that brand satisfaction is not enough to explain loyalty completely (Kumar et al., 2013; Oliver, 1999).

Secondly, brand loyalty results in a tendency for the consumer to be loyal to a brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) when buying its products or services and avoiding changing the brand (Palazón & Delgado, 2009). Brand loyalty is, then, a deep commitment that causes repeated brand purchases even if the situational influences or marketing efforts change (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, loyalty can be seen from a purchase loyalty or an attitudinal loyalty approach. Purchase loyalty is the consumer's willingness to buy back the brand while attitudinal loyalty is the level of consumer commitment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Attitudinal loyalty can lead to the protection of the brand by the customer by giving positive feedback (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995), willingness to recommend products or price tolerance (Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2009). This type of brand loyalty based on a commitment to repeat purchases or a tendency to prefer certain products or services in the future has been supported by various research (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015). It is generally agreed that loyalty is based on an ongoing process that manages to maintain a valuable relationship between brand and consumer based on trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In addition, research shows that the emotional factor is a key aspect in encouraging consumer choice of a brand and subsequent brand loyalty (Song et al., 2019).

Achieving strong brand loyalty is the greatest goal of any brand, as it reflects an attitude of repeat purchase and recommendation (Molinillo et al., 2019). Therefore, the study of brand loyalty is relevant because keeping current consumers is more valuable than attracting new ones (Kim & Gupta, 2009) and trust is a fundamental aspect of understanding the process of creating brand loyalty (Flavián et al., 2005). Some studies have observed that loyalty can be determined by the trust and feelings aroused by the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

However, further work is needed to analyse the effects of brand personality on key concepts such as trust, as the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty has not been widely studied (Kim et al., 2001). Hence, this study aims to show a conceptual model that highlights the mediating role of brand trust in the indirect effects of brand personality on brand loyalty.

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2.1 Brand personality – Brand trust

From a relationship marketing perspective, trust is one of the positive consequences that result when a brand's personality traits are identified with those of the consumer.

Gurviez and Korchia (2003) define trust as a multidimensional concept consisting of credibility, integrity and benevolence. The combination of these three dimensions determines the level of consumer trust in a brand.

The relationship between brand personality and brand trust has been studied from different perspectives (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Rampl & Kennign, 2014; Sung & Kim, 2010; Valette-Florence, R. & Valette-Florence, P., 2020). Louis and Lombart (2010) propose a model that demonstrates the impact of brand personality in three relational consequences of this concept: trust, attachment and commitment to the brand. A research conducted by Sung and Kim (2010) based on the brand trust and brand affect model proposed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, 2002) explains that brand personality features explain consumer brand affect, trust and loyalty.

Other later research also highlights this relationship (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2017) showing that brand personality positively affects three consumer-brand relationships constructs (brand awareness, brand trust and brand loyalty). When consumers perceive that the brand personality matches their personality traits and allows them to express them, this increases the feeling of purchase satisfaction, credibility (Veloutsou, 2015) and positively influences confidence and the possibility of buying that brand again (Brakus et al., 2016; Japutra et al., 2018; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019). Considering these previous studies, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand personality has a significant positive effect on the trust it builds in consumers.

2.2 Brand trust – Brand loyalty

The impact of trust on loyalty has been studied from various sectors such as smartphones (Lam & Shankar, 2014), the chocolate market (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012) or business to business (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). It has also been found in brand communities in digital environments that increased consumer confidence through communications can foster brand loyalty (Habibi et al., 2014).

Regarding the mediating role of trust with other attributes, in the banking sector, it has been found that brand trust mediates between brand association and loyalty (Phan & Ghantous, 2013). Some research in the hospitality sector has shown that brand trust is a mediator between CSR, image and loyalty and leads to increased loyalty and a positive image among customers (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018). Additionally, recent studies have shown the relationship between brand image, satisfaction, trust and brand loyalty (Song et al., 2019), as the symbolism associated with certain companies can make consumers buy products because of their functional effects (for instance, brand

attributes) (Zhang, 2015). From other approaches, trust has also been shown to be a source of loyalty when the brand is considered a lovemark (Song et al., 2019).

Considering that brand satisfaction is not enough to completely explain loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Oliver, 1999), it should be noted that the identification of the brand with the consumer occurs at two levels: a personal level where the brand highlights the personality, values and beliefs of the person (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003); and a social level where brands act as instruments of communication regarding the aspirations and status of consumers (Tuškej et al., 2013). Therefore, those consumers who have a deep brand identification are able to more clearly support the brand's products as well as its reputation and thus become loyal (He & Li, 2011). This research argues that identification could be due to an association with brand personality traits that are aligned with those of the consumer.

Therefore, previous studies have shown that loyalty is a consequence of trust and the feelings triggered by the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Additionally, other studies, such as Sung and Kim (2010), Molinillo et al. (2017) or Japutra and Molinillo (2019), have found that brand personality features explain a direct effect on brand trust and loyalty. However, there is no research which analyses the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between brand personality and loyalty. Regarding the direct relationship between personality and loyalty, research proposes that brand personality positively affects brand awareness, brand trust and brand loyalty (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2017). Additionally, Kim et al. (2011) showed that brand personality has an indirect effect on brand loyalty via positive word-of-mouth.

Consequently, it seems appropriate to analyse the role that trust can play in the overall relationship of personality and loyalty and therefore to propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Trust has a positive and significant influence on consumer loyalty.

Therefore, trust has a mediating role between brand personality, and the loyalty it generates in the consumer's purchasing behaviour.

2.3. Brand personality – Brand loyalty

In the current competitive context where the consumer has many choices, achieving consumer loyalty is a crucial aspect for the survival of the brand (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). Delving into the influence that brand personality has on loyalty is one of the research streams on brand personality research (Kim et al., 2001; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010; Kumar et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2009; Lin, 2010; Molinillo et al., 2017; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014; Zentes et al., 2008).

Molinillo et al., (2017) and Japutra and Molinillo (2019) have shown that brand personality positively affects brand awareness, brand trust and brand loyalty. Studies such as those of Brakus et al., (2009) and Ramaseshan and Stein (2014) find that brand personality has a positive effect on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, Mengxia (2007) found a positive influence of brand personality on consumer preference, affection, loyalty and purchasing intention.

Consequently, the literature stresses that choosing a brand with a certain personality allows consumers to express themselves (Aaker, 1997) and creates a close link between the consumer and the brand, which increases loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Similarly, Kim et al. (2001) conclude that once a brand personality enhances people's self-expression it can increase loyalty.

Therefore, taking into account previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand personality has a direct, positive and significant effect on loyalty

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

For the development of the proposed theoretical model, a sample of Spanish consumers was used. In Europe, digital expenditures, as a share of consumer spending per capita, reached 3.4%, while in Spain this number reached 4.1%. The revenue in the eCommerce market amounted to US\$17,267.4m in 2019 according to the country report of Statista (Schlumbohm et al., 2020). Spain's economy is also the fifth largest in the European Union (Eurostat, 2020). Thus, for the creation of the model the information was retrieved with an online questionnaire provided to a sample of 1,015 individuals (Spanish consumers), using stratified random sampling and with a sampling error of 3.08% where $(p=q=0.5)$. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

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The data collection was done through an online survey, using a structured questionnaire that contained the items corresponding to the scales used (brand personality, trust and loyalty). The latent variables of the proposed model were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", and were coded inversely in those cases where it was necessary to do so.

The sample was selected from an online panel managed by the Gfk research company in Spain, which is composed by consumers selected on an individual basis to fit the socio-demographic characteristics of the Spanish population (INE, 2020). Those characteristics are based on gender, age, province, level of education, to mention a few.

Participants receive personal invitations for one time only, thus reducing the risk of self-selection and possible duplication. The response rate of the panelists was 47%, and the entire process is certified by ISO 20252.

The selection of the respondents was done through a stratified random sampling, to replicate as close as possible the sociodemographic characteristics of the universe (the Spanish population). The strata were selected based on geographical criteria (province), age, and gender. Participants received rewards in the form of points redeemable for gifts, unrelated to the products and/or brands that might appear in the research. In addition, the points were given after the survey was completed so it is not possible that the participant used those points to purchase products that could be related to the object of study. Therefore, there are no biases resulting from obtaining rewards that might distort the perception of a brand and/or a given product category.

3.2 Measures Development

The Brand Personality Scale (Aaker, 1997) was developed from its five basic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, all consisting of the original items proposed by Aaker. The Brand Trust Scale (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003) was also based on its original four dimensions (credibility, integrity, and benevolence) consisting of their original items. Finally, the scale of brand loyalty (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) was built from one of the dimensions of the brand value scale, formed by its three original items (“I consider myself to be loyal to some brands”, “There is always a brand that would be my first choice”, and “I will not buy other brands if my favourite brand is available at the store”).

As a prerequisite for the estimation of the measurement model and the structural model, an analysis of extreme cases was conducted, and the assumption of multivariate normality was tested. Although there are estimation procedures such as the ADF (Asymptotically distribution free) (Kline, 2015; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003) that are more tolerant of this requirement, it can sometimes present problems in the process of estimating the parameters. For the detection of extreme multivariate cases, Mahalanobis distance was used (Mahalanobis, 1936) as a diagnostic test. After analysis, nine cases were eliminated from the sample because they presented multivariate values far from the central tendency. Once these outliers have been eliminated, it can be considered that the data set does not present serious anomalies that could distort the process of estimating structural parameters. For the normality test, the Mardia coefficient was used (Mardia, 1974). The kurtosis obtained for the set of variables did not present high values, which allows the application of the theoretical model without problems associated with the absence of multivariate normality. Cases with missing values were eliminated from the sample, as they did not represent a significant percentage of the sample (2.2%). After these adjustments, the total sample was composed of the 1,015 individuals mentioned.

4. Results

The estimation of the model, and the interpretation of the results, were conducted following the standard sequential process in structural equation models. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were analysed, and then the structural model was estimated and the hypotheses tested.

4.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

Reliability and Validity

In all cases, the scores of Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) were higher than the standard limits stipulated (Tabla 2), and the results of the confirmatory analysis showed the expected factor structure. In this sense, the model does not pose problems of internal validity.

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Additionally, the results obtained through the calculation of the average variance extracted (AVE) show values above 0.5, so the model does not present problems of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, all the factorial loads of the measurement model are significant, and above 0.5 (see Table 3).

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The following indicators have been used to evaluate construct validity: (i) χ^2 statistics and its significance level, (ii) RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) and its confidence interval, (iii) SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual), (iv) NFI (Normed Fit Index), and (v) CFI (Comparative Fit Index) (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, and Müller 2003). The chi-square statistic is the only test of significance, but is very sensitive to sampling conditions and violations of assumptions of normality. The corresponding adjustments are shown in Table 4, along with two additional indices: GFI (Goodness-of-fit Index), and AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index), which

consider the complexity of the model, and would be equivalent to the adjusted coefficient in linear models.

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Finally, discriminant validity was evaluated using the matrix formed by the square root of the average variance extracted in the diagonal, and the correlations between constructs outside the diagonal (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In all cases, the values of the square root of AVE are greater than the correlations and therefore there are no problems related to this type of validity (see Table 5).

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4.2. Hypotheses test

Our hypothesis posited that: (i) brand personality has a significant positive effect on the trust it builds in consumers, (ii) trust has a positive and significant influence on consumers' loyalty, and (iii) brand personality has a direct, positive and significant effect on loyalty. The results obtained allow us to reject the null hypotheses related to H1 and H2, since all the coefficients have the expected signs according to the hypotheses posed, and are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). However, in the case of H3, it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis and, therefore, the brand personality has no statistically significant effect on loyalty ($p = 0.894$) (see Table 6).

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Therefore, the results show that brand personality has a positive influence on the confidence that a brand builds up in the consumer (H1: “Brand Personality” -> “Brand Trust”). In addition, it has been found that trust in brands has a statistically significant influence on brand loyalty (H2: “Brand Trust” -> “Brand Loyalty”). However, unlike other research, there is no direct effect of brand personality on loyalty ($p=0.894$). Based on these results, it is relevant to observe how the effect of brand personality on loyalty is indirect, through trust. Therefore, the construction of the brand personality, formed by dimensions such as sincerity, sophistication or competition, has an indirect influence on brand loyalty, which strengthens the relationship of the consumer with the brand and constitutes a key competitive factor. Specifically, the standardized indirect effect of Brand Personality on Brand Loyalty is 0.732. This effect is mediated by the Brand Trust and therefore the increase of the Brand Personality by one standard deviation is an indirect increase in brand loyalty of 0.73 standard deviations.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study shows that trust plays a mediating role between personality and brand loyalty and therefore that brand personality has a significant indirect effect on loyalty.

Surprisingly, the results show that there is no significant direct effect of personality on brand loyalty.

Trust has been investigated mainly through brand satisfaction (Molinillo et al., 2019). Research has shown that this trust builds brand loyalty (Flavián et al., 2005; Lam & Shankar, 2014; Syed Alwi et al., 2016). However, previous studies have indicated that

brand satisfaction is not enough to explain brand loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Oliver, 1999). Hence, trust has also been analysed from the point of view of its potential to promote spillover effects with other brand attributes. Thus, its mediating role in influencing loyalty has been studied in relation to brand association, CSR, brand image or others (i.e. Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018; Phan & Ghantous, 2013; Song et al., 2019). Within this whole context of analysis, the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty has not been studied in depth by the literature (Kim et al., 2001).

Consequently, this study has deepened the set of relationships between personality, trust and brand loyalty through the development of a theoretical model. To this end, a random sample of 1015 individuals by stratified random sampling was used and a questionnaire was provided that included the brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997), the brand trust scale (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003) and the brand loyalty scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The results strengthen previous studies that support the significant positive effect of brand personality on trust and trust in loyalty. One of the findings of the study is that it shows the mediating role of trust and therefore the indirect effect of personality on loyalty. The results, thus, are aligned with and complement the studies analysed in the theoretical framework and all hypotheses have been supported.

Firstly, the results show that brand personality has a positive influence on the trust that a brand inspires in the consumer. These data strengthen the findings of previous literature explaining that personality is able to predict brand trust (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Molinillo et al., 2017; Sung & Kim, 2010). The explanation could be that brands that align their personality traits with those of their consumers, and therefore allow them to express themselves, lead to increased satisfaction and, consequently, trust (Brakus et al., 2016; Japutra et al., 2018; Japutra & Molinillo, 2019).

Secondly, trust in brands has a statistically significant influence on brand loyalty. This result supports and reinforces previous studies such as those described by Lam & Shankar (2014), Kuikka & Laukkanen (2012), Syed Alwi et al. (2016), Habibi et al. (2014) among others. These research studies have been previously explained through different scales that have revealed the direct relationship between trust and loyalty in sectors such as smartphones, the chocolate market or even business to business.

The main finding of the study is that trust plays a mediating role between personality and brand loyalty, causing personality to affect loyalty indirectly. Studies on the indirect effects of personality on loyalty are not very abundant but have attracted the interest of previous literature. For example, the concern to demonstrate this indirect effect was studied through the mediating role of positive word-of-mouth (Kim et al., 2011). For that reason, the results shed new light on a novel topic that has been studied from different approaches. This result implies a new understanding of brand loyalty triggers and the important mediating role of trust in the set of relationships. Although previous studies had analysed brand personality along with trust and loyalty (i.e. Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2017; Sung & Kim, 2010), this research sheds light on the indirect effects of personality on loyalty through trust. The explanation could be that, by associating the personality traits of brands with consumers, the latter are able to increase their satisfaction and, therefore, their trust towards the brands. Indirectly, this chain of effects supports the creation of brand loyalty.

In this set of conclusions, it is very important to note that a direct and significant relationship between personality and brand loyalty has not been demonstrated. This finding is striking and contrasts with a variety of studies that have highlighted that brand personality has a direct effect on loyalty (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2017). Thus, the results of this research open new lines of investigation on the direct

effect of personality on loyalty, since unlike previous research that found this relationship (i.e. Brakus et al., 2009; Mengxia 2007; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014), it has not been demonstrated that the relationship exists without the mediating role of trust.

The managerial implications of this study are twofold. On the one hand, marketers need to know that trust is a fundamental driver in achieving loyalty and therefore repeat purchases. Only through a satisfied customer is trust achieved, which will enhance the retention of the customer portfolio even in adverse situations. On the other hand, beyond satisfaction, brand management, through its association with personality attributes, can lead to trust. In a situation where communication and brand management are based on storybuilding, storydoing and storytelling, the strengthening of personality traits and the ability to align with the personality of customers can lead to the formation of trust and loyalty. This has deep implications for brand management and the design of communication strategies which should be more closely linked to displaying clear personality traits in the brands they manage and therefore articulate as unique, a strategy that will also lead to differentiation. Although the sample is very representative because of the number of participants, one of the limitations of the study is that it focuses on a single country. Future research should validate the hypotheses in other cultural contexts.

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Fig. 1 Conceptual model

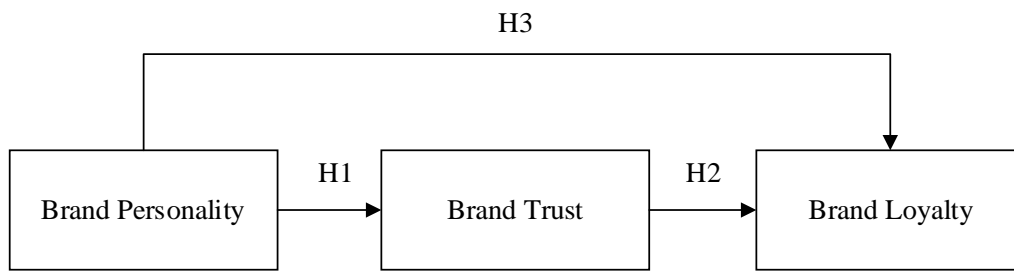


Table 1. Descriptive Analysis

	Frequency	Percentages
Age		
16–24	120	11.82
25–34	164	16.16
35–44	233	22.96
45–54	208	20.49
55–64	162	15.96
65–74	128	12.61
Total	1,015	100
Gender		
Male	508	50.05
Female	507	49.95
Total	1,015	100

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha

Latent variables	Alpha	Lower	Upper	Std.error
Brand personality				
Sincerity	0.78	0.76	0.8	0.008
Excitement	0.85	0.83	0.87	0.007
Competence	0.79	0.78	0.8	0.011
Sophistication	0.71	0.69	0.73	0.015
Ruggedness	0.75	0.74	0.76	0.008
Brand Trust				
Credibility	0.81	0.79	0.84	0.016
Integrity	0.73	0.7	0.76	0.008
Benevolence	0.78	0.77	0.79	0.005
Brand Loyalty				
Brand Loyalty	0.87	0.85	0.89	0.007

Table 3. Factor Loadings

Latent variables and items	Factor loading	Std. Error	p-value
Brand Personality			
Sincerity			
My favourite brands always satisfy my demands as a consumer.	0.769	0.054	<0.001
My favourite brands never disappoint me.	0.847	0.004	<0.001
My favourite brands are genuine and authentic.	0.754	0.065	<0.001
Excitement			
My favourite brands are fun.	0.862	0.061	<0.001
I prefer brands that are imaginative.	0.893	0.045	<0.001
I like innovative brands.	0.831	0.046	<0.001
I like brands that break the rules.	0.845	0.068	<0.001
Competence			
With my favourite brands, I get exactly what I'm looking for in a product.	0.783	0.025	<0.001
My favourite brands are smart.	0.812	0.045	<0.001
I prefer successful brands.	0.798	0.049	<0.001
Sophistication			
I like prestigious brands	0.723	0.046	<0.001
I prefer sophisticated brands	0.702	0.065	<0.001
Ruggedness			
My favourite brands are determined and brave	0.781	0.049	<0.001
I prefer brave brands.	0.736	0.057	<0.001
Trust			
Credibility			
My favourite brand's products make me feel safe.	0.791	0.045	<0.001
Buying my favourite brand's products is a guarantee.	0.854	0.051	<0.001
I trust the quality of my favourite brand's products.	0.802		<0.001
Integrity			
My favourite brands are sincere with their consumers.	0.712	0.025	<0.001
My favourite brands are honest with their customers.	0.751	0.085	<0.001
My favourite brands express an interest in their customers.	0.732	0.062	<0.001
Benevolence			
I think my preferred brands renew their products to offer the best.	0.812	0.012	<0.001
I think that my favourite brands are always looking to improve.	0.771	0.045	<0.001
Loyalty			
I consider myself to be loyal to some brands.	0.845	0.054	<0.001
Some brand would always be my first choice.	0.932	0.012	<0.001
I will not buy other brands if the one I am looking for is available at the store.	0.912	0.015	<0.001

Table 4. Model Fit Indices

Index	Value	CI (Lower)	CI (Upper)
RMSEA	0.049	0.047	0.052
SRMR	0.059		
NFI	0.935		
CFI	0.952		
GFI	0.941		
AGFI	0.926		

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Matrix

	Sincerity	Excitement	Compet.	Sophist.	Rugged.	Credibility	Integrity	Benev.	Loyalty
Sincerity	0.791								
Excitement	0.444	0.858							
Competence	0.134	0.893	0.797						
Sophistication	0.039	0.771	0.069	0.710					
Ruggedness	0.327	0.540	0.012	0.318	0.758				
Credibility	0.540	0.587	0.350	0.120	0.418	0.816			
Integrity	0.520	0.488	0.469	0.135	0.134	0.249	0.732		
Benevolence	0.110	0.053	0.615	0.569	0.210	0.470	0.174	0.791	
Loyalty	0.620	0.187	0.449	0.650	0.220	0.300	0.680	0.432	0.897

Note: Square root of average variance extracted (AVE) on the matrix diagonal

Table 6. Summary of SEM Results (Standard Estimates)

Hypotheses				Estimate (Std.)	Std. error	Critical value	p-value
H1	Brand personality	->	Brand Trust	.954	.085	11.323	***
	Brand Trust	->	Credibility	.922	.073	11.825	***
	Brand Trust	->	Benevolence	.988			***
	Brand Trust	->	Integrity	.931	.083	11.879	***
H2	Brand Trust	->	Loyalty	.819	.088	9.335	**
	Brand personality	->	Sincerity	.984			***
	Brand personality	->	Competence	1.085	.086	11.597	***
	Brand personality	->	Excitement	.737	.083	9.687	***
	Brand personality	->	Sophistication	.640	.102	7.464	***
	Brand personality	->	Ruggedness	.782	.096	8.907	***
H3	Brand personality	->	Loyalty	-0.51	.418	-1.134	.894

*p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01