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THE ROLE OF CONSUMER-BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN TOURISM CONSUMPTION: FROM USER-GENERATED CONTENT TO MY GENERATED CONTENT

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With the rise of Web 2.0 and digital content marketing consumers are increasingly interested in sharing their experiences with others by implementing real brand-related citizenship behaviors (e.g., sharing travel experiences or brand-related experiences on social networks). Drawing on the customer engagement ecosystem model (Maslowska et al., 2016), this study aims to highlight the role social aspects of consumption play in predicting consumer brand engagement (CE), specifically, if both exposure to others actors' purchasing behavior (OAB) and social visibility of consumption (SVC) might influence consumers' brand dialogue behaviors (BDB) through CE. We conducted a cross-sectional survey in which participants (N = 250) completed an online questionnaire about tourism brands. We performed a mediation analysis using a structural equation modeling approach. Results suggest that both OAB and SVC might influence BDB, through the mediation of CE. In our model, CE partially mediates the effect of OAB on BDB, and it completely mediates that of SVC on BDB. Consumers who perceive the tourism brand chosen as more socially visible will probably have higher levels of CE, and, in turn, will exhibit more BDB. The more consumers believe that other people choose a specific tourism brand, the more they engage with it and the more they show BDB. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Customer engagement; Tourism brand; Social network; User generated content; Conspicuous consumption.

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The virtual world plays a pivotal role in the international tourism landscape and represents an opportunity for companies to promote their brands and engage their customers (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020a; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; So et al., 2020). The new technological frontiers, with their extraordinary communication possibilities, allow real-time communication among several actors in the commercial ecosystem (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Maslowska et al., 2016). Through social networks, companies can promote their products (goods or services) in a participatory and customized manner (Hollebeek et al., 2021), which was little employed until a few years ago. Personal aspects of both marketers and consumers are playing a key role in marketing (van Osselaer et al., 2020).

It is a new era. Two-way communication and influence create continuous interaction and comparison between consumers and companies, resulting in a mutual exchange of benefits (van Osselaer et al., 2020; Vargo, 2021).

The sharing of travel experiences is changing the tourism industry practices. By means of user generated content (UGC), consumers can dialog with the company and other consumers. Therefore, their travel experiences may be public and socially visible. Accordingly, travelers attribute greater importance to destination image when the holiday destination is considered very socially visible (Josiassen & Assaf, 2013). Correia et al. (2016) highlighted the relevance of conspicuous consumption and social status on travel choices. Correlational studies suggest the close association between social visibility of consumption (SVC), customer-brand identification, and positive word-of-mouth communication in tourism online context (So et al., 2018).

The online content posted by other tourists may be an important source of information that can influence consumers' choices before and during travel (Kang & Schuett, 2013; Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019). Several aspects of influencers' posts (e.g., attractiveness, prestige) affect consumers' attitudes, which, in turn, leads to positive behavioral outcomes (e.g., social media word of mouth, purchase intentions) through the desire to mimic them (Ki & Kim, 2019). Experimental evidence suggests the effect of travel influencers' characteristics on consumers' intentions to travel to the advertised destinations and purchase the advertised products (Jang et al., 2020). Hence, in Web 2.0, users play a proactive role in the marketplace and directly contribute to brand marketing by creating their brand-related content (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). They can freely express themselves and share their tourism experiences publicly (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). People usually share their travel experiences because they enjoy doing so (Oliveira et al., 2020). Ningthoujam et al. (2020) showed how the use of social networks by consumers for customer-brand interactions is a significant antecedent of their levels of customer engagement. Hardly surprising results, considering the massive use of these platforms and the growing investment in these tools by companies. Malthouse et al. (2016) found that engaging consumers to create brand-related UGC in line with their personal goals affects their purchasing intentions.

Despite the increasing interest in UGC and consumer-brand engagement (CE) in tourism consumption (So et al., 2020), few studies have focused on the joint role of other UGC and SVC in shaping CE levels and related behaviors. Are SVC and other UGC related to CE? Can CE mediate the relationship between the latter and consumers' brand-related online behaviors? This study aims to fill this gap through a cross-sectional quantitative approach.

Social Visibility Of Consumption and Identity Implication

People evaluate others based on the products they consume, considering consumption styles relevant to social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Solomon, 1983). Consumption choices can be a direct expression of a specific social belonging or social status (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). This process causes people to use this symbolism to create their own social identities and define themselves (Eastman & Eastman, 2015; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Rather & Camilleri, 2019; Solomon, 1983). Given the "reflective" nature of the self-concept (Mead, 1934), the other social actors play a role of validation and attestation of the consumer's identity. The exchange between brand and consumer may take place before the eyes of an audience — other consumers. In this sense, socially visible consumption poses a challenge to the consumer and their identity. For Daugherty et al. (2008) consumers make their consumption experiences socially visible by producing UGC due to the social and self-protection functions (Katz, 1960) that the brand can represent. In other words, they would make their consumption public either to avoid or to achieve a specific self-image. Elsharnouby et al. (2016) found that the perception of value congruence between oneself and the brand leads the consumer to identify more with the brand in the context of socially visible consumer experiences. Choi and Burnham (2020) showed that the perception of a specific brand enhances one's social self (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and mediates the relation between brand prestige and consumer sharing behaviors.

CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Research is currently focusing primarily on the study of CE (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Schivinski et al., 2021; So et al., 2020), a psychological state in which the consumer feels enthusiastically immersed in the relationship with a brand. According to the current literature, the state of engagement can be defined as "an individual's state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed or engrossed in something (i.e., sustained attention), generating the consequences of a particular attraction" (Higgins & Scholer, 2009, p. 102) and more precisely the CE as "a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Cognitive engagement favors a sense-making process related to the brand, the emotional component elicits the consumer's identification with the brand, while the behavioral activation component influences the implementation of brand-related citizenship behaviors (i.e., those actions that go beyond merely purchasing a product or that are neither prescribed nor strictly involved in the commercial exchange between the consumer and the company; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Due to its interactive and motivational nature, engagement has become one of the most important and frequently studied constructs in the relational marketing sector. For this reason, the literature has increasingly focused on studying this construct in the field of tourism consumption as well (So et al., 2020). Some relational constructs seem to predict CE: among others, co-creation (Tu et al., 2018), consumer involvement (Harrigan et al., 2018), self-brand connection (Bryce et al., 2015), and brand commitment (Itani et al., 2019). Customers' brand experiences (Ahn & Back, 2018), identification (Alrawadieh et al., 2019), and self-congruence (Chen et al., 2020) may also predict CE level. CE seems to predict brand loyalty (Rather et al., 2018), brand love (Shin & Back, 2020), brand experience (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021), and behavioral intention (Rather, 2020).

A particular form of UGC often associated with high levels of CE is brand dialogue behaviors (BDB), namely "all non-purchasing behaviors inherent to the brand" (Maslowska et al., 2016, p. 13), that is the modalities of consumption not indicated by the company, the methods of using a product that are different from those suggested. These behaviors, in a highly interconnected environment such as Web 2.0, influence other consumers' attitudes (Maslowska et al., 2016). Maslowska et al. (2016) propose in this regard an innovative model that considers the context surrounding the consumer and its role in affecting CE — the customer engagement eco-system. This eco-system consists of three interactive units, linked by a relationship of mutual influence: (a) the actions taken by the brand (i.e., "all the suggestions of the company, starting from product development and including the rest of the marketing mix, including price, advertising, promotion, and distribution, …" p. 8); (b) other actors' behavior (OAB); (c) consumer's levels of CE. A system characterized by circular complexity reflecting "an environment that is dynamic, nonlinear, in real-time, and reflective of the inter-relationships between brands, customers, and one another" (Maslowska et al., 2016, p. 5).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

According to Maslowska et al. (2016), a brand characteristic (e.g., social visibility, prestige) and other consumers' behaviors (e.g., brand choice) may directly influence CE and the resulting behavior. Recent evidence supports these two distinct hypotheses individually (Ahn & Back, 2018; Bilro & Loureiro, 2020b; Busalim et al., 2019; Delbaere et al., 2021; Hammedi et al., 2015; Schultz, 2017;), but few studies focus on their simultaneous influence on CE. Rather and Camilleri (2019) suggest that consumers' perception of value congruity with a tourism brand positively affects consumer-brand identification and, in turn, the levels of CE. However, to date, no studies have highlighted the role of SVC on CE in tourism. There is little evidence of the possible mediation role of CE between SVC and consumer's brand-related behavior. The social visibility choice of a tourism brand (e.g., hotel, restaurant, airline company) may affect consumers' CE levels. The latter, in turn, may affect consumers' online behavior. For instance, being aware of others' brand choices, as well as the social visibility of a brand, may enhance CE.

Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) provided evidence suggesting the mediation role of brand engagement in self-concept between the perceived influential power of digital influencers and purchase intention. However, these constructs are rather different from the ones in this study. They measured the consumer perception with regard to influencers' advice (e.g., "The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me" p. 371), we measure consumers' beliefs about influencers' and other people's brand choices (e.g., "The influencers I follow on social networks choose this tourism brand"). We wanted to highlight how just knowing that other people choose the brand may shape CE. They studied the "brand engagement in self-concept" (Sprott et al., 2009), whereas we set out to measure more general CE.

As a social influence process, OAB (e.g., influencers' or users' brand choices) might affect that of consumers (e.g., their brand-related non-purchasing behavior, i.e., BDB) through high CE levels. Therefore, besides a mere emulation direct effect of OAB on BDB, CE may partially mediate their relation. The effect of others' brand-related choices on consumers' behavior may not just be a superficial imitation. The former could affect a deep brand engagement state, which, in turn, may affect consumers' BDB. Hence, we expect a direct effect of OAB on BDB (i.e., the mere emulation path), and an indirect effect mediated by CE (i.e., the engagement path).

Moreover, the SVC may also affect CE. Given the social implication of conspicuous consumption, higher levels of SVC could be associated with higher CE levels and BDB. CE may mediate the effect of SVC on BDB: the more a tourism brand is perceived as socially visible, the more it engages; the more the latter, the more BDB occur.

Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: OAB is positively related to CE: the more consumers believe that other people choose the brand, the more they engage with it;

H2: CE is positively related to BDB: the more consumers engage with a brand, the more they exhibit brand dialogue online behavior;

H3: OAB is positively related to BDB: the more consumers believe that other people choose the brand, the more they exhibit brand dialogue online behavior (i.e., the mere emulation path);

H4: SVC is positively related to CE: the more consumers perceive the brand as socially visible, the more they engage with it;

H5: CE partially mediates the relation between OAB and BDB (i.e., the engagement path);

H6: CE mediates completely the relation between SVC and BDB.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The data was collected on a convenience sample of 250 Italian consumers of tourism brands (59.7% female, aged 18 to 73, M = 33.95, SD = 13.6). Participants were recruited through a snowballing sampling strategy, with the collaboration of psychology students at the University of Padova, over of two months. The online survey was individually and anonymously completed voluntarily. Before taking part in the study, participants expressed their informed consent online. Fifty point four percent (50.4%) of the participants reported having a university degree, 44% a high school diploma, and 5.6% a junior high school license. Thirty-three percent of participants were employees, 31% were students, 23% freelancers, 8% managers, 3% pensioners, and 2% unemployed.

Measures

The self-report questionnaire included a socio-demographic section and the scales shown below. Following So et al. (2018) and Harrigan et al. (2018), participants were asked to indicate the name and category of a tourism brand that they had recently used and to respond to the various scales by referring to the latter. Thirty point two percent ($n = 75$) of participants chose a wellness and entertainment brand (e.g., spa, cruise), 28.6% ($n = 71$) a hospitality brand (e.g., hotel, farmhouse), 19.8% ($n = 49$) a transport brand (e.g., airlines or train companies), 17.7% ($n = 44$) a food and wine brand (e.g., restaurant, wineries), 3.6% ($n = 9$) a tour operator brand. Due to the non-negligible skewness of the empirical distribution of participants' scores of CE and BDB, two Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed. No difference was noticed in the level of both CE, $\chi^2(4) = 8.96$, $p = .062$, and BDB, $\chi^2(4) = 5.42$, $p = .247$, across all the types of tourism brands considered.

Measurement items and psychometric properties of the scales are reported below (Table 1).[1]

Social visibility of consumption (SVC). An adapted version of Josiassen and Assaf (2013) scale was used to measure the perception of social visibility of a brand consumption. It is composed of three items measured on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Used in the most recent studies on conspicuous consumption (So et al., 2018), it also proves very reliable in the Italian context (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Other actors' behavior (OAB). We generated three ad hoc items by which participants were asked how frequently they believed that famous people, influencers, and other users they followed on social networks chose the brand they had previously chosen. The responses to the items were measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Consumer-brand engagement (CE). The Hollebeek et al. (2014) scale was used because it was successfully assessed in the tourism context by Harrigan et al. (2018). It is composed of three subscales for the measurement of the three facets of the construct. It consists of 10 items measured on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): three for the subscale relating to the cognitive sphere, four for the affective one, and three for the behavioral one. The scale has a Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$, specifically the Cronbach's alphas of the three subscales have the following values: $\alpha = .76$ for the cognitive subscale; $\alpha = .91$ for the affective one; $\alpha = .88$ for the behavioral one.

Brand dialogue behaviors (BDB). We generated three items about the frequency of certain online brand-related behaviors. Participants were asked to answer on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$).

They were also asked to indicate, on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), how often they use social networks during the day ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.98$, Skeweness = –0.83, Kurtosis = 0.42).

TABLE 1
Psychometric properties –Measurement items

Latent variable and reflective indicators	*M* (*SD*)	Skeweness	Kurtosis	Loading λ_1	Loading λ_2	McDonald's ω
Social visibility of consumption (SVC) Josiassen & Assaf (2013)						.91
SVC1	3.66 (0.95)	0.41	–0.31			
SVC2	3.66 (0.95)	–0.47	–0.37			
SVC3	3.38 (1.09)	–0.39	–0.31	.98***		
Other actors' behavior (OAB)						.87
OAB1	2.60 (1.22)	–0.35	–0.37	.73***		
OAB2	2.31 (1.16)	–0.39	–0.39	.96***		
OAB3	2.47 (1.17)	–0.31	–0.73	.84***		
Consumer-brand engagement (CE) Hollebeek et al. (2014)						ωL1= .71 ωL2= .72
Cognitive consumer engagement (CCE)					.90***	.78
CCE1	3.39 (0.97)	–0.52	–0.76	.98***		
CCE2	3.35 (1.10)	–0.46	–0.70	.65***		
CCE3	3.54 (1.06)	–0.69	0.02	.51***		
Affective consumer engagement (ACE)					.80***	.91
ACE1	3.82 (0.94)	–0.87	0.79	.81***		
ACE2	3.91 (0.95)	–0.85	0.73	.83***		
ACE3	3.98 (0.87)	–0.91	1.22	.92***		
ACE4	3.54 (1.04)	–0.40	–0.22	.74***		
Behavioral consumer engagement (BCE)					.50***	.89
BCE1	2.99 (1.2)	–0.08	–0.98	.78***		
BCE2	3.21 (1.19)	0.24	–0.85	.94***		
BCE3	3.44 (1.16)	0.51	–0.66	.81***		
Brand dialogue behavior (BDB)						.80
BDB1	2.54 (1.28)	0.26	–0.98	.73***		
BDB2	1.93 (1.15)	1.08	0.29	.80***		
BDB3	2.23 (1.31)	0.58	–0.98	.70***		

Note. $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

RESULTS

Missing Data and Sample Size

In the preliminary phase of screening for missing data, two participants (0.8%) only responded to less than half of the survey, hence they were excluded from the analysis. The final sample size (N = 248) allowed us to use structural equation modeling analysis to test our hypotheses. According to Bentler and Chou (1987) and Kline (2005), a ratio of approximately 10 participants per estimated parameter was ensured (Weston & Gore, 2006).

Preliminary Analyses

All analyses were performed with the R statistical software system (v. 3.6.3): R-core project (R Core Team, 2020). The following packages were used: lavaan (v. 0.6-6; Rosseel et al., 2015), MVT (v. 5.8; Korkmaz et al., 2014), and semTools (v. 0.5-4; Jorgensen et al., 2021).

The indices of central tendency, dispersion, skewness, and kurtosis were calculated for each item of the model (Table 1). Although skewness and kurtosis values of almost all items were between –1 and 1, Shapiro-Wilk tests for univariate normal distribution were significant for $p = .001$ for each item. Moreover, we conducted a Mardia's test for the null hypothesis that the measurements have a multivariate normal distribution. Results showed a multivariate nonnormal distribution of items: skewness: $\hat{\gamma}_{1,p} = 57.87$, $\chi^2(1330) = 2392$, $p < .001$; kurtosis $\hat{\gamma}_{2,p} = 455.46$, $z = 15.73$, $p < .001$.

Based on these results, we used a robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator into confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models (Bentler & Yuan, 1999; Lai, 2018). Specifically, Yuan-Bentler correction for the chi-squared model test (Yuan & Bentler, 2000, 2006) and Huber-White sandwich for robust standard errors were used (Bentler, 1983; Huber, 1967). To evaluate the goodness of fit of the model, we used the following fit indices: χ^2, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), Bayesian information criterion (BIC). Acceptable model fit was defined by the following values: χ^2 nonsignificant; $\chi^2/df < 3$; RMSEA less than .06, .06 to .08 for a reasonable fit; CFI close to .95, .90 to .95, for a reasonable fit; SRMR less than .08; BIC, the model with the lowest BIC is preferred (Capozza et al., 2019; Iacobucci, 2010; Kline, 2005; Marsh et al., 2004).

All Spearman correlation coefficients among items were significant for at least $p < .05$ and ranged between $\rho_s = .14$ and $\rho_s = .85$, except SVC1 and SVC3 with a rho of $\rho_s = .94$, suggesting possible problem of multicollinearity and item redundancy. Multicollinearity represents a crucial point for the reliability of linear regression parameters.

In line with Diamantopoulos et al. (2012), after carefully scrutinizing the items, we concluded that these items could be semantically redundant (Rossiter, 2002). Therefore, we preferred to remove one of them in the following structural model, despite the high reliability of the scale (McDonald's $\omega = .91$), given that neither of them provided additional information (Drolet & Morrison, 2001; Hayduk & Littvay, 2012). Following Weston and Gore (2006) and considering the relatively small sample size, it was a reasonable choice to avoid a possible power and reliability worsening in structural parameter estimation. The Spearman-Brown coefficient (Eisinga et al., 2013) for the new two-item scale (SVC1 and SVC2) was $\rho_{1,2} = .83$.

The CE scale (i.e., one second-order factor, three first-order factors) showed a good fit: $\chi^2(32) = 88.63$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.75$; CFI =.95; RMSEA = .08, 90% CI [.06, .09]; SRMR = .06; BIC = 5784.7, compared with a model with only one factor in which the 10 items are loaded: $\chi^2(35) = 410.61$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 11.7$; CFI =.67; RMSEA = .24; 90% CI .[.22, .26]; SRMR = .139; BIC = 6210; $\Delta SB\chi^2(3) = 201.34$, $p < .001$. All the factor loadings (λ_1: first factor; λ_2: second factor) are reported in Table 1.

To test for common method bias (Bagozzi et al., 1991) we used Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) which showed that the various items in their totality share less than 50% of their variance. We inserted all the items in a principal components analysis (PCA) with a non-rotated solution. Results showed that the first component explains 24% of variance among items. Moreover, the CFA with a single latent factor provided worse fit indices: $\chi^2(152) = 1192.8$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 7.8$; CFI = .55; RMSEA = .16, 90% CI [.15, .17], p(RMSEA < .05) < .001; SRMR= 0.142; BIC = 12040, than the CFA with six correlated factors: $\chi^2(120) = 222.16$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.85$; CFI =.96; RMSEA = .05, 90%CI [.04, .07], p(RMSEA < .05) = .107; SRMR = .06; BIC = 11073). Model comparison suggested the absence of common method bias: $\Delta SB\chi^2$ (32) = 832.8, $p < .001$(Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-squared difference test was used; Satorra & Bentler, 2001).

Reliability, Convergent, and Discriminant Validity

Each scale showed Cronbach's α, McDonald's ω greater than the common threshold of .70 (Table 1), suggesting good levels of reliability for all measures (Green & Yang, 2015; Hayes & Coutts, 2020; McDonald, 2000). For CE, the second-order factor ω_{L1} refers to the proportion of variance of observed variables that is explained by the second-order factor, whereas ω_{L2} refers to the proportion of variance of first-order factors explained by the second-order factor (Jorgensen et al., 2021).

The values of the average variance extracted index (AVE) are higher than the generally assumed threshold of .50 (Fornell & Larker, 1981), thus offering evidence of convergent validity (Table 2).

To check discriminant validity, we used the Fornell and Larcker's criterion (1981) according to which the root square of the AVE index of each variable must be greater than the correlations of the same with the others. AVE is an index of the amount of variance of items explained by the factor in relation to the amount of variance due to the error of measurement (Fornell & Larker, 1981). As can be seen from Table 2, it is verified.

TABLE 2
Correlations between latent variables, average variance extracted (AVE) index

	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.SVC	.77	**.88**					
2.OAB	.70	.22***	**.83**				
3.CCE	.56	.52***	.36***	**.74**			
4.ACE	.71	.45***	.31***	.69***	**.84**		
5.BCE	.72	.33***	.23***	.51***	.44***	**.85**	
6.BDB	.55	.49***	.52***	.60***	.51***	.38***	**.74**

Note. AVE = average variance extracted; SVC = social visibility of consumption; OAB = other actors' behavior: CCE = cogntive consumer engagement; ACE = affective consumer engagement; BCE = behavioral consumer engagement; BDB = brand dialogue behavior. Pearson correlations (off diagonal), square root of AVE (main diagonal, in bold).
**p* <.05. ***p* <.01. ****p* <. 001.

Structural Equation Models

To test the structural equation model, CE was defined by using a partially disaggregated parcel approach (Coffman & MacCallum, 2005; Rossi et al., 2020). Using a facet-representative strategy (Cole & Preacher, 2014; Hall et al., 1999) for each first-order factor of CE (i.e., CCE, ACE, BCE), the items were combined in a single score. Thus, the mean of the items of each dimension became one reflective indicator of CE. A total disaggregation approach (Hoe, 2008; Little et al., 2013) was used for the other latent variable (i.e., SVC, OAB, BDB). Because of the extreme correlation between SVC1 and SVC3 (ρ_s = .94) the latter was not included in the structural model.

To test the model hypotheses (Figure 1) a structural equation model was performed. We used a bootstrapping procedure (95% CI, 5000 resamples) to compute the confidence interval of each indirect effect (Cheung, 2009; MacKinnon, 2012).

The CFA of the model showed a good fit: $\chi^2(39) = 67.6$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 1.73$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .05, 90% CI [.03, .07], p(RMSEA < .05) = .346; SRMR = .03; BIC = 7069.

Analyzing the direct effects among the latent variables, it emerged that OAB has a positive and significant effect on both the CE ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .17$, $p < .001$; H1) and the BDB ($\beta = .26$, $SE = .07$, $p < .01$; H3). SVC has a positive and significant effect on CE ($\beta = .72$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$; H4). CE has a positive effect on BDB ($\beta = .62$, $SE = .12$, $p = .004$; H2; Figure 1).

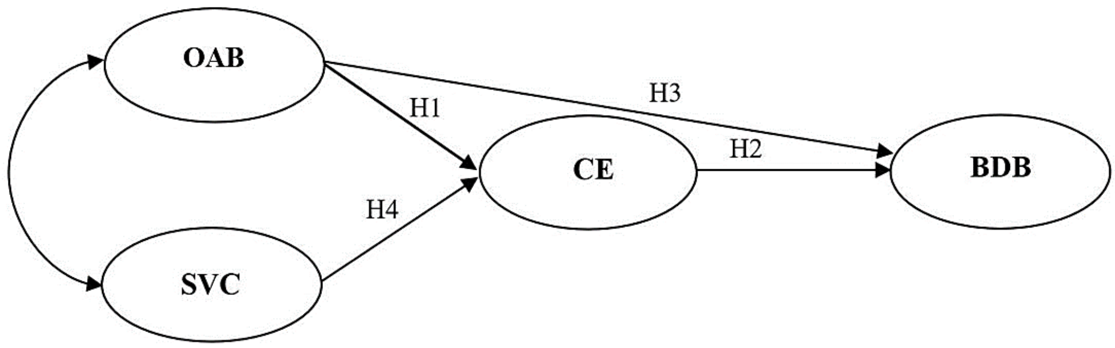

FIGURE 1
Hypothesized relationships between constructs.
Note. SVC = social visibility of consumption; OAB = other actors' behavior; CE = consumer-brand engagement; BDB = brand dialogue behavior.

As expected, the relationship between OAB and BDB is partially mediated by CE ($\beta = .15$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$) supporting H5, even if it is a relatively small effect size (Ferguson, 2009). H6 is also supported because the relationship between SVC and BDB is significantly mediated by CE — $\beta = .44$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$ (Table 3). The model explained 58% of CE variance ($R^2 = .58$) and 66% of BDB ($R^2 = .66$). CE mediates about 36% of the total effect of OAB on BDB, the indirect effect is about 60% of the direct one (MacKinnon, 2012).

We tested a less restricted model with both direct and indirect effects of exogenous variables (i.e., OAB and SVC) on BDB. We attained the following model fit indices: χ^2 (38) = 65.3, $p = .004$; $\chi^2/df = 1.71$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05, 90% CI [.03, .07], p(RMSEA < .05) = .364; SRMR = .04; BIC = 7072.5. The chi-squared difference test was not significant, $\Delta SB\chi^2$ (1) = 2.33, $p = .126$. The direct effect of SVC on BDB was not significant ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .12$, $p = .123$). This model explained 56% of CE variance ($R^2 = .56$) and 63% of BDB variance ($R^2 = .63$). According to our hypotheses and following the principle of parsimony (i.e., "Occam's razor principle"), the first model was preferred. As stated by Danner et al. (2015) "if two models do not differ significantly, the more parsimonious model (with more degrees of freedom) is accepted" (p. 465). Moreover, the first model explained more variance of two endogenous variables.[2]

TABLE 3
Model hypotheses, standardized coefficients, standard errors, and confidence intervals

Hypotheses	Structural Path	β	*SE*	[95% CI]
H1	OAB → CE	.24***	.17	[0.076, 0.232]
H2	CE → BDB	.62**	.12	[0.618, 1.105]
H3	OAB → BDB	.26***	.07	[0.099, 0.374]
H4	SVC → CE	.72***	.07	[0.530, 0.845]
H5	OAB → CE → BDB	.15***	.13	[0.059, 0.217]
H6	SVC → CE → BDB	.44***	.10	[0.394, 0.760]

Note. SVC = social visibility of consumption; OAB = other actors' behavior; CE = consumer-brand engagement; BDB = brand dialogue behavior. 95 % bootstrap confidence intervals.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to highlight the possible effects of some aspects of consumer social context on brand-related behavior. Specifically, whether consumers' perception of other social actors' choice of a brand may relate to their brand-related behaviors. The awareness that influencers, celebrities, or other consumers usually choose a certain tourism brand may affect their consumers' behavior. It could be seen as a social influence process. We also expected that choosing a socially visible brand might enhance consumer brand-related behaviors. Thus, consumers would choose a brand to express a specific self-image, for instance, by posting brand-related content online or sharing brand-related experiences. These two distinct processes could be mediated by consumer-brand engagement. Hence, the beliefs about other people's brand choices and the social visibility of the same brands could affect CE, and in turn, consumer behavior.

Results discussed so far support these hypotheses. Structural equation models we conducted suggest the predictive role of other actors' brand choices (OAB) and the SVC on CE and BDB. Specifically, the functional relation between OAB and BDB is partially mediated by CE. In line with our hypotheses, this suggests a double path of social influence: a direct effect of OAB on BDB, as an emulative behavior not mediated by a deep absorption state of engagement (i.e., the emulation path) and an indirect effect, mediated by CE, as a meaningful, thought-out, and perceived process (i.e., the engagement path). Moreover, the conspicuous consumption process was supported. CE seems to mediate completely the relation between SVC and BDB. Thus, the more consumers perceive the tourism brand chosen as socially visible, the more they will have higher levels of CE, and in turn, will exhibit more BDB. Standardized coefficients showed a strictly close relation between SVC and CE, and quite a large indirect effect of SVC on BDB through CE. Conversely, the effect of OAB on CE, although significant, is smaller. The mediated effect by CE between OAB and BDB is smaller than that between SVC and BDB.

Thus, based on these results, the SVC predicts high levels of CE. The more a tourism brand is socially visible, the more consumers are engaged with it and the more they will exhibit "online brand-related non-purchasing behaviors" (BDB). Evidence strongly supports this statement and suggests no direct effect of SVC on the latter. Thus, SVC affects BDB levels through the consumer state of brand engagement, but not directly. The consumers' social visible and public choice of a tourism brand may affect his/her behavior through CE. On the other hand, another parallel process takes place: the more consumers believe that other people choose a tourism brand, the more they are engaged with it, the more they exhibit BDB.

In line with Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019), our results suggest that influencers' or other people's choices may shape individual CE levels. Thus, knowing that other people satisfactorily choose a specific brand may increase CE. Furthermore, we found that believing that other people will know their brand choice may enhance their CE. CE may be predicted by both their beliefs about what other people choose and what they know about their brand choice. However, further research is needed.

The results we have found may be influenced by other variables that we have not measured in this research. Many other variables could play a key role in the relations highlighted above. Self-brand connection (Harrigan et al., 2018) may affect the association between OAB and CE. Brand love (Shin & Back, 2020) or brand experience (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021) might mediate the relation between CE and BDB. Experimental procedures could highlight the causal relationship among these variables.

Managerial implications

These results confirm the investments that tourism companies are making in relation to advertising or digital content marketing campaigns on social networks. The inbound strategies undertaken by current tourism organizations (De Carlo et al., 2020), which focus their resources more on communication via social media, can promote their brand through new and probably more persuasive methods. The use of influencer marketing (Delbaere et al., 2021) and users' advocacy behavior can highlight brand value (Hollebeek et al., 2021). In this way, the brand can be promoted and supported through the creation of digital content by customers, as opposed to aggressive and pedantic advertising. These UGC, such as BDB, are particularly useful in promoting a product. They can highlight the positive experience of other consumers, apparently not interested in its promotion for profit.

Notes

1. The Italian version is available upon request from the authors.
2. This model was compared with a mediation model with control variables, that is, daily use of social media (SN) and gender (G), and the effect of the control variables on CE and BDB was not significant.

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