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Consequences of customer experience quality on franchises and non-franchises models

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to verify the differences of the influence of customer experience quality on brand equity, brand trustworthiness, perceived quality, perceived risk and purchase intention of franchise customers and non-franchise customers.

Design/methodology/approach – After developing two questionnaires, the authors collected 523 responses from Brazilian franchise users (Questionnaire 1) and 574 of non-franchise users (Questionnaire 2). The authors proceed to a confirmatory factor analysis, based on covariance (CB-SEM). In order to compare the results between franchises and non-franchises, the authors have performed a multi-group analysis with support of AMOS.

Findings – The results show that customer experience quality of the franchise customers tends to result in a better purchase intention, giving indications of better quality and brand trustworthiness when compared to non-franchises. This comparison shows indications of the competitive advantage of franchises over non-franchises, justifying the investments that market companies have been making in the development of the customer experience quality.

Originality/value – The research contributes to the understanding of the impact of the customer experience quality on brand equity, brand trustworthiness, perceived quality, perceived risk and purchase intention that directly affects the performance of the franchises, empirically investigating the customer experience quality in the context of franchises using the adapted EXQ scale. Complementarily, it is compared with non-franchises to observe the differences between them.

Keywords EXQ, Purchase intention, Customer experience, Franchises

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The franchise sector in Brazil consists of approximately 146 thousand units of nearly three thousand networks generating more than 1m jobs. In 2017, the sector’s revenues increased approximately 8 percent compared to 2016 (ABF – Associação Brasileira de Franchising, 2017). These numbers indicate emerging markets as destinations for larger investments by international franchisors. After 2008, entry into developing countries became a viable means of expanding franchises (Welsh et al., 2006).

Franchisors have always faced management difficulties in establishing adequate uniformity and standardization that generate economies of scale and, concurrently, avoid the suppression of entrepreneurship, in addition to adapting to local conditions (Piot-Lepetit et al., 2014). In this
context, to be successful, retail business models focus not only on what to sell, but on how to sell shifting the emphasis in retail to customer experience quality (Zhibin and Dag, 2014).

Delivering superior customer experience quality is regarded as a key objective (Verhoef et al., 2009), as it significantly impacts on satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth intentions, triggering the purchase and repurchase behavior (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). Professionals began to assess the customer experience quality as one of the most promising marketing approaches to meet the future challenges of consumer markets (Homburg et al., 2015).

In this sense, this study aims to verify the differences of the influence of the customer’s experience quality on brand equity, brand trustworthiness, perceived quality, perceived risk and purchase intention of franchise customers and non-franchise customers. We have named franchises as exclusive branded stores, a business relationship through a licensing agreement between two independent firms to market a product/service using standardization processes and a brand name that is owned by a franchisor (Wu, 2015; Chiou and Droge, 2015). Non-franchises were termed multi-brand stores, defined as stores that sell products of different brands.

The acceleration of franchises in emerging markets is receiving attention in academic literature and in practice. However, we find scattered literature (Welsh et al., 2006). Recently, El Akremi et al. (2015) examined the franchise performance components addressing the dynamic capabilities. Wu (2015) understood the perceptions of franchisees on franchise strategy and performance using the resource-based theory and relationship marketing. Jean Jeon et al. (2014) investigated differences in the perception of customers on the quality of national vs local companies in the context of service franchises evaluating the purchase intention.

Three reasons justify our study. First, 89 percent of companies surveyed by GARTNER, Inc (2016) expect to compete in the future focusing on customer experience quality and franchise and non-franchise clients tend to present different behaviors in front of this new optics, which can be proven by observing the differences between them, as proposed here. Second, through empirical testing using the EXQ scale (Klaus and Maklan, 2012), we investigate the impact of customer experience quality in the context of franchises and non-franchises by relating it to traditional constructs systematically studied in other sectors, comparing them. Previous franchise literature mostly considers the drivers of customer satisfaction, but does not focus on customer experience quality as a broad construct that can result in a stronger company performance in terms of market metrics (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Professionals began to assess the customer experience quality as one of the most promising marketing approaches to meet the future challenges of consumer markets, focusing on metrics such as customer lifetime value instead of creating value for customers.

The research on customer experience quality confirms that the main objective is to increase the intentions of customers to return to live the purchase through a journey of a certain company or brand, from post-purchase to pre-purchase (Homburg et al., 2015).

Third, we expand knowledge about the influence of customer experience quality on purchase intention to support in practice whether the additional investment in delivering a successful experience allows franchises (and non-franchises) to obtain positive returns. We respond whether customer experience quality tends to influence store-relevant elements such as the perceived quality of products/services, brand equity, brand trustworthiness and perceived risk, expanding the knowledge and evidencing the different results between franchises and non-franchises as claimed by the literature (Jean Jeon et al., 2014; Pankaj, 2016).

2. Theoretical framework

Franchising is a form of cooperation between firms in which two types of entrepreneurs share tangible/intangible resources to increase business performance. The franchisor benefits from the expansion leveraging financial capital and acquiring local market knowledge, while the franchisee benefits from brand equity and organizational routines (Piot-Lepetit et al., 2014). In franchising, franchisors provide at least two important resources: brand and
operational routines. Brand is a key to competitive advantage in industries that are franchised, enabling the sharing of knowledge that can favor the quality of the client’s experience, minimizing transaction costs for the end customer (Wu, 2015). Quality control of franchises is essential for franchisors to safeguard the capital of their brand. In return, franchisees achieve operational efficiency and effectiveness, acquiring proven operational procedures and management support from its franchisors. Standardization generally leads to higher productivity and lower costs for franchise systems (Lin et al., 2014).

Franchises were previously evaluated as more efficient than non-franchises (Jean Jeon et al., 2014). However, this research focuses on the factors of the customer experience quality that promote and influence the consumer’s purchase intention, both in franchises and in non-franchises. Given the broad set of touchpoints and the dynamic nature of customer experience quality (Homburg et al., 2015), we have measured the direct influence of the customer experience quality construct on the traditional marketing constructs such as brand equity, perceived quality of products, brand trustworthiness, risk and purchase intention. Whereas franchises operate with an exclusive and more valuable brand (Wu, 2015) in addition to being experts in offering their own products and services (Lin et al., 2014), we investigate whether the customer experience quality provided to the franchise customer tends to influence brand equity, perceived quality of products, brand trustworthiness, risk and purchase intention more than the experience provided by non-franchisees, which have general product lines, selling several brands (Jean Jeon et al., 2014).

2.1 Customer experience quality

In academia, the notion of customer experience quality is not well understood, is fragmented in several contexts and is insufficiently demarcated from other marketing management concepts. The concept of quality of the client’s experience is highly interrelated with different concepts such as market orientation, highlighting the orientation of a company in relation to norms that guide employees’ work attitudes, or even with customer relationship management which indicates customer retention and profit maximization as the main objectives. However, they both differ from the concept of customer experience quality (Homburg et al., 2015).

After gathering current concepts on the subject, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) concluded that customer experience quality is a multidimensional construction focused on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory and social responses. This experience influences the entire purchase journey of the customer, i.e. the entire process that a customer goes through, in all stages and points of contact, resulting in the customer experience quality. A touchpoint represents any verbal or non-verbal incident that a person consciously perceives and relates to a particular company or brand (Klaus et al., 2013).

Homburg et al. (2015) argue that the customer experience quality must be managed by firms taking into account their cultural mindsets regarding experiences, strategy to design experiences and capabilities of the company to continually renew experiences, with the goals of achieving and maintaining long-term customer loyalty. The cultural mindsets of a company refer to the way managers use to describe a company’s competitive advantage. Strategic directions for projecting experiences represent intangible resources based on direct exchange with customers. The ability to renew experiences refers to a pattern of processes and routines that aid in the design, prioritization, monitoring and adaptation of the journey and its touchpoints. Based on this direction, we assume that the customer experience quality is capable of influencing traditional marketing contractors, such as purchase intention, perceived quality, brand equity, brand trustworthiness and perceived risk, since the customer experience quality tends to build, in the consumer’s mind, the image of the store, reflecting on positive perceptions of quality and brand, encouraging the consumer to buy.

For empirical investigation of customer experience quality, we use the scale by Klaus and Maklan (2012), which validated the concept of customer experience quality (EXQ).
The scale suggests that customers perceive the experience in four dimensions: outcome focus, product experience, moments of truth and peace of mind. Most companies use only customer satisfaction or their derivative, Net Promoter Score (NPS), to evaluate the experiences. Klaus and Maklan (2012) present an appropriate measure for the modern conceptualization of the customer experience quality, establishing that it better explains the customer experience quality than the previous measures of customer satisfaction.

Recently Kashif et al. (2016) validated the EXQ. Perceptions of EXQ contributed significantly to satisfaction and loyalty in Malaysian private hospital services. Pankaj (2016) used the EXQ to determine if and how groups separated by demographic variables (age, gender, schooling level and family income) differ regarding the quality dimensions of customer experience quality in the context of the retail store in India. The analysis revealed that some categories of demographic variables differ in relation to the quality dimensions of the client experience. In this study, the adoption of the scale allows identifying the differences between the influence of the customer experience quality on purchase intention, perceived quality, brand equity, brand trustworthiness and perceived risk in models of franchises and non-franchises given clients tend to present different behaviors facing the experience provided by stores in the Brazilian retail context, which is the environment we investigate here.

2.2 Brand equity
Brand equity represents the additional value that the brand itself brings to a product/service when compared to another similar product/service, unbranded though (Shamim et al., 2016). A brand generates positive or negative effects on consumers, which influences their decisions in relation to the elements of the marketing mix. The different perceptions of consumers in relation to brands shape their behavior, which impacts market share and profitability, directly (Keller, 2016).

Since brand equity tends to directly impact consumer preferences, in their behavior, strategies aimed at its strengthening should be adopted (Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin, 2014). Brand equity positively influences purchase behavior and franchises tend to suffer this influence for working with an exclusive brand and consequently more valuable (Wu, 2015).

Kashif et al. (2016) affirm that customers value the brand by identifying items such as security, flexibility and ease of service provision. Consumers’ perception in making choices and the ability to compare deals had a significant and positive effect on consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Klaus et al., 2013). Yoon (2013) indicated that shoppers’ preferences for experimentation vary according to the type of product. The results indicated that shoppers at department stores preferred affective experiences, whereas at discount store and online shoppers preferred rational experiences. Sensory experiences had a positive effect on impulse purchasing for department stores, while rational experiments had a negative effect.

For exceptional experiences, the customer must be visually involved with the brand in the chosen touchpoints that will have the ability to deliver a memorable event. This contact with the brand should not only be associated with owned stores, themed restaurants, flags and graphic signs of the brand but with touchpoints strategically aimed at fostering the customer experience quality with a cognitive, emotional, sensorial and behavioral objective (Homburg et al., 2015). The companies researched by Homburg et al. (2015) highlight the need to carefully design and maintain their corporate identity elements at various points of contact to ensure recurrent experiential responses that increase loyalty over time. Given that the franchise is a brand specialist (Wu, 2015), purchasing experiences tend to increase the perceived brand equity when compared to non-franchises, which have a generalist product line selling several brands (Jean Jeon et al., 2014). Therefore, we propose:

H1. Customer experience quality positively influences the perceived brand equity for consumers in franchises more when compared to non-franchises.
2.3 Perceived quality of products/services

The quality of the experience provided to the customer can build a buying habit, even in competitive environments and with other known offers. This shopping experience can associate with the quality of the product or service delivered to the customer directly (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). Perceived quality is defined as being the result of the judgment of consumers on products/services considering the excellence or superiority (Snoj et al., 2004). The process of forming perceived quality occurs through the general evaluations carried out by the consumer in relation to what is delivered to them (Lam and Shankar, 2014).

The results of the research by Jean Jeon et al. (2014) indicate that the fact that a company is franchised influences the perception of customers about quality, especially when based on experience because customers believe that franchised brands provide greater service capacity, convenience and lower risk than local brands.

Homburg et al. (2015) presents steps to be followed by companies that aim to develop consumer experiences. Customer experience quality should be managed by companies first considering their cultural mindsets to subsequently design and renew consumer experiences. The result for the company in adhering to this goes beyond traditional satisfaction results such as the NPS, impacting also on the perception of the quality of products and services offered by the company. Given that the process of forming the perceived quality of a product or service occurs through general and broad assessments that the consumer makes in relation to what is delivered to them (Lam and Shankar, 2014), and that franchise products and services, because of their specialization with a particular brand, tend to be regarded as those whose outcome is potentially more satisfactory (Jean Jeon et al., 2014), we propose:

\[ H2. \] Customer experience quality positively influences the perceived quality for consumers on franchises more when compared to non-franchises.

2.4 Brand trustworthiness

Brand trustworthiness is described as a component of credibility, which represents the perceptions of consumers, in a cognitive, affective and behavioral way about the firm’s commitment to keep promises (Morhart et al., 2015). Shin et al. (2016) demonstrate that facing a crisis in one of the franchised units, when there is explicit communication of the franchisor holding the brand, increases trust toward the franchise, avoiding any further negative effects on the franchised chain.

Daily situations of relationship with the customer, measuring the ability of service providers to offer solutions to problems when dealing with customer needs, had a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction and a higher effect on loyalty (Klaus et al., 2013).

The companies participating in the research of Homburg et al. (2015) project potential journeys at the touchpoint from perspective and relationship with the consumer as a means of planning and modeling business. Companies with more dominant cultural mindsets and therefore with better brands, act as models in the market, presenting consistency in the projection of new experiences, stimulating in this direct exchange with the customer the brand trustworthiness. Since the formation of relational situations comes from the experience offered and that franchises tend to offer services and products with standards focused on processes pre-established and tested elsewhere (El Akremi et al., 2015), potentially the customer experience quality should influence brand trustworthiness (Lam and Shankar, 2014). Thus, we propose:

\[ H3. \] Customer experience quality positively influence brand trustworthiness for consumers in franchises more when compared to non-franchises.
2.5 Perceived risk

Risk perception occurs when the consumer feels some form of uncertainty or sees the possibility of some negative consequence due to the purchase itself. The simple identification of the brand on the product provides a degree of perception of security and protection against the risk of purchase (Calvo-Porral and Lang, 2015).

It is paramount to consider customer evaluations at all points of relationship with the provider, before, during and after product or service delivery, for measuring the experience because customer trustworthiness comes from the certainty that the company knows what it is doing (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). Kashif et al. (2016) affirm that customer experience quality significantly influenced customer trust and satisfaction based on the skills of the attending teams. Homburg et al. (2015) also specify the need for companies to review the experiences provided over time through an “audit experience,” synthesizing customer perceptions in depth for understanding the contact points. The “audit experience” aims to check the points of contact with the customer to list and modify something that brings uncertainty or negative consequence on the purchase journey, that is, impact the perceived risk directly.

Given the implementation of actions that the management of the customer experience quality requires (Homburg et al., 2015; Klaus and Maklan, 2012), assuming that consumers seek safety, and that franchise products and services are viewed by consumers as being more reliable compared to products and services offered in non-franchises (Jean Jeon et al., 2014) and assuming that customers find that non-franchise purchases are potentially riskier than franchise stores (Lin et al., 2014), we propose:

\[ H4. \text{ Customer experience quality influences perceived risk on franchises less when compared to non-franchises.} \]

2.6 Purchase intention

Purchase intention means the tendency to buy a product, with its knowledge being important, because we can predict the consumer’s behavior by their intention (Wu et al., 2015). Purchase intention is influenced by factors previously studied (Dodds et al., 1991; Grewal et al., 1998) however, there are several factors that may influence the purchase intention of a consumer, both in franchises and in non-franchises.

For example, the perceived image of the business is influenced by the name and quality of merchandise it possesses. The price is influenced by discounts, brand and perceived quality, significantly influencing the perceived value. Perceived value and store image positively influence purchase intention (Grewal et al., 1998). The research results by Lin et al. (2014) indicate positive relationships between the intent to purchase franchise items and the perceived risk of purchasing from unfamiliar retail stores.

In order to highlight the relevance of actions of sensory and affective stimulation in the consumers’ purchase intention, the companies surveyed by Homburg et al. (2015) stated that this investment exists because the cultural mindset of the company is focused on the customer experience quality, even though these effects cannot be measured directly. Given that the process of forming the purchase intention occurs through a broad set of customer contact points (Klaus and Maklan, 2012), that these customers are encouraged to relive the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase journey (Homburg et al., 2015) and that the franchise system more frequently renews the patterns of experiences provided to the client (Lin et al., 2014), we propose:

\[ H5. \text{ Customer experience quality positively influences the purchase intention for consumers on franchises more when compared to non-franchises.} \]

2.7 Proposed model

The proposed model (Figure 1) was designed to empirically investigate the influence of customer experience quality on perceived brand equity, perceived product quality, brand
trustworthiness, perceived risk and purchase intentions of franchise and non-franchise customers. We assume that the perceived quality of the product, perceived brand equity, brand trustworthiness and purchase intention are positively influenced by the customer’s experience quality and the perceived risk is negatively influenced by the construct.

3. Methods
The population of the study comprises of any Brazilian individual who claimed to know stores of exclusive brands, for the case of franchises, businesses using standardization processes and a brand name that are owned by a franchisor (Wu, 2015; Chiou and Droge, 2015), and multi-brand stores for the case of non-franchises, defined as stores that sell products of different brands. The sample of the research regarding franchises comprises of 523 individuals who said they knew exclusive brand stores, whereas that of non-franchises counted on 574 respondents who said they knew multi-brand stores.

To obtain the data, we used two questionnaires prepared in an online platform, one to capture consumers’ perceptions of franchise stores and one for non-franchises. We collected data through two distinct forms that had 39 questions each. In the franchise questionnaire, we invited the respondent to recall and relive a shopping experience they once had in a franchise. In the non-franchise questionnaire, we invited the respondent to recall and relive a shopping
experience they have had in a non-franchise. In the heading of both questionnaires, we highlighted the concept of franchises and non-franchises. For franchises, we used the nomenclature exclusive stores and we gave several examples with names of franchises well known nationally by the Brazilian consumer, such as: McDonald’s, Hering, Havaianas, O Boticário, Richards, Cantão, Contém 1g, Cacau Show, Maria Filó and Salinas. For non-franchises, we used the nomenclature multi-brand stores (popular and informal name used by Brazilian consumers) and we explained that they were companies that sell products of different brands. We mentioned several examples to make it clear to the respondent what kind of store they should consider: Bella Donna (women’s wear), Tons (women’s wear), Café Teu Grano (coffee shop), Fragrance Import (perfumes), Pastiolla (food), Ariadne (beauty products), Fio de Ouro (women’s shoes), Sapataria (men’s shoes), Maschio (men’s fashion) and Tecnomania (electronics). We did not control by type of store in order to get a larger sample.

After this presentation, the first question of each of the questionnaires was a control item about the knowledge of exclusive brand/multi-brand stores respectively. Sequentially, we used 34 variables referring to the six constructs investigated, presented in the appendix: four statements measured perceived brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000); eight statements measured perceived quality of products/services (Grewal et al., 1998); five statements measured brand trustworthiness (Erdem and Swait, 2004); four statements measured perceived risk (Laroche et al., 2005); seven statements measured purchase intention (Dodds et al., 1991); six statements measured customer experience quality (Klaus and Maklan, 2012).

The answers of the 34 statements were carried out by means of a scale of five points (1 – totally disagree, 5 – totally agree). The language of the questionnaires was adapted according to the profile of the store models investigated in each of them (franchises and non-franchises). Four demographic questions were asked in each form to identify the respondent’s sex, age, income and schooling.

To validate the forms, we completed a pre-test with 12 individuals. Before the online disclosure of the questionnaires, we conducted a plan in order to ensure that each respondent received only one of the forms, dividing among the research team the disclosure of a single questionnaire for different bases. The response period was July 2017.

The demographic profile presented by the two samples was similar, with the majority of respondents aged over 25 years (75.33 percent franchises/85.37 percent non-franchises), women (65.20 percent franchises/63.76 percent non-franchises), presenting monthly income equal to or greater than 2,000 (BRL) (70.17 percent franchises/80.14 percent non-franchises) and the majority with higher education or greater level of schooling (82.03 percent franchises/81.88 percent non-franchises). We classified the samples as appropriate for the research objective, since they present a typical profile of consumer of franchises and non-franchises: mostly women at economically active age, with high levels of schooling and income. The degree of similarity of the samples enabled us to compare the results.

The sample originally collected was composed of 1097 completed questionnaires. Data analysis, performed with the help of the IBM AMOS package, was preceded by the verification of the existence of multivariate outliers, identified by means of the Mahalanobis quadratic distance (D2) of all observations. The calculation was performed from the specification of the measurement sub-model that contained all the items of the questionnaire and carried out before any adjustment. By adopting a conservative approach, we eliminated 32 observations with D2 above 100 (Marôco, 2014). Thus, the final sample used in the analyses was reduced to 1065 observations. In the sequence, we evaluated the normality of the variables by means of the asymmetric coefficients analysis (Sk) and kurtosis (Ku). No variables presented results that suggested violations to the normal distribution (|Sk| < 2 and |Ku| < 7) (Marôco, 2014).

After the data treatment phase, we proceed to a confirmatory factor analysis, based on covariance (CB-SEM). For this purpose, we adopted the two-step strategy (two-step), as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This technique ensures that the measurement
model is duly validated, which may not occur when other strategies are used (Marôco, 2014). Thus, the first step was the specification of the measurement sub-model. For this, all 34 variables were used, related to the six constructs selected for the present study. Then, we calculated the composite reliability (CR) levels, as well as the values of the average variance extracted (AVE), which allowed to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs used in the model.

Finally, in order to advance the hypotheses of the study, we performed a multi-group analysis, from the available feature in the IBM AMOS package. In this sense, we measured the invariance of the measurement model in the two groups by comparing the unconstrained model (factorial weights and variances/covariances of free factors) with a constrained model, for which the factorial weights and the variances/covariances of the two groups. The invariance of the structural model was evaluated by comparing the model with free structural coefficients against the model with fixed and equal structural coefficients in both groups. The statistical significance of the difference of the models was made with the $\chi^2$-test, as described in Marôco (2014). Finally, we assessed the significance between model parameters in the two groups with the $Z$-test for the comparison 2 to 2, produced by IBM AMOS.

4. Analysis

4.1 Validation of the measuring model

In order to analyze the degree of fit of the model, we used the $\chi^2$ statistic and associated degrees of freedom (DF). Several goodness of fit indices were calculated, ranging from incremental, absolute and parsimony. In this sense, we used the following indicators: goodness of fit index (GFI); comparative fit index (CFI); Tucker–Lewis index (TLI); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA); parsimony comparative fit index (PCFI); parsimony goodness of fit index (PGFI); standard root mean residue (SRMR). Thus, after structuring the model, we performed the calculations of the fit indexes and the factor loadings related to the observed and latent variables, which resulted in insufficient values ($\chi^2 = 3,022.349$; DF = 512; GFI = 0.844; CFI = 0.876; TLI = 0.864; RMSEA = 0.067; PCFI = 0.799; PGFI = 0.726; SRMR = 0.0741).

However, an analysis of the trajectories indicated that some items had low factor loadings. According to Hair et al. (2014), all factor loadings must necessarily be greater than 0.5, but preferably greater than 0.7. Thus, we adopted a conservative strategy and with the intention of preserving the recommended value of three observed variables for each latent construct (Hair et al., 2014), we opted for the elimination of items with factor loadings lower than 0.6, considering also that the constructs have a reflexive nature. Thus, the following items were eliminated from the model: PI3(−0.05); PI2(−0.33); PQ8(0.45); BT3 (0.53); PQ6 (0.57) e BE1(0.59). We pointed out that items were eliminated one by one, in the sequence presented, with the re-calculation of the model at each elimination.

From a new processing of the model, we observed that the modification indexes (MI) pointed to a strong correlation between the error of the item PQ7 and the construct BT. Thus, considering the injury caused to the orthogonality of the factors, we opted for the withdrawal of said observed variable. However, we also observe from the MI that the errors of items PR1 and PR2 were highly correlated, both linked to the perceived risk (PR) construct. Thus, in view of the similarity of the content of the items, we chose to add a correlation trajectory between the respective errors (Marôco, 2014).

Following, we performed the reliability level calculations (CR), as well as the values of the AVE, which allowed to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs used in the model. However, the process indicated convergent insufficiency of validity for the construct EXQ, which led to the withdrawal of items EX1 and EX2. We also detected discriminant validity problems in the model, in front of which it was necessary to eliminate the items PI2, BT4 and PQ1.
Thus, the final measurement model now has 21 observed variables, distributed among the six specified constructs, which remained with a minimum of three items, as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). Thus, the final fit indexes of the measurement model were satisfactory. More precisely, the new results obtained were: $\chi^2 = 386.205$; DF = 173; GFI = 0.967; CFI = 0.982; TLI = 0.978; RMSEA = 0.034; PCFI = 0.809; PGFI = 0.724; SRMR = 0.0315. Table I presents the results of convergent and discriminant validity analyses, in detail, accompanied by the acceptance criteria of each test, in the light of Hair et al. (2014).

In order to advance the hypotheses of the study, we performed a multi-group analysis, from the resource available in the IBM AMOS package. For this purpose, we created a dummy variable, in which the non-franchise observations were identified as 0. In contrast, responses referring to the franchises received a value of 1. The objective of this stage was to evaluate if the structural trajectories that relate the constructs do not differ between the observations related to the franchises and the observations related to non-franchises.

The first step was to perform an invariance test of the variance-covariance matrices between the groups, from the measurement model, by the comparison of the statistics ($\chi^2$). That is, in this step we test the hypothesis of weighting factors invariance, and the statistic testing is given by the difference of the $\chi^2$ of the model with fixed weighting factor and the model with free weighting factors (Marôco, 2014). For this purpose, preliminary, we identified that the proposed measurement model presented a good fit, simultaneously, to franchises and non-franchises ($\chi^2$/df = 1.882; GFI = 0.947; CFI = 0.975; PCFI = 0.803; PGFI = 0.709; RMSEA = 0.029; IC 90 percent (0.036; 0.048)). Thus, the model showed configurational invariance. Following, we analyzed the invariance of the measurement model in both groups, by means of the comparison between a model with free parameters and another one with fixed weighting factors, variances and covariances. Thus, considering, according to Marôco (2014), that $\Delta\chi^2 (17.676) < \chi^2 (15) (24.966)$, the hypothesis is not rejected (null), that is, the goodness of fit of the two models is not significantly different ($p = 0.280; \alpha = 0.05$).

In the sequence, we performed the analysis of the invariance of the structural model, again by comparing the model with free structural coefficients against the model with fixed and equal structural coefficients in the two groups. The statistical significance of the difference of the two models was performed with the $\chi^2$-test, as described in Marôco (2014). By considering that $\Delta\chi^2 (16.111) < \chi^2 (15) (24.966)$, we do not reject the hypothesis (null), that is, the goodness of fit of the two models is not significantly different ($p = 0.375; \alpha = 0.05$), as shown in Table II.

However, from an analysis of the fit between the free model and the model with equal intercepts between the two groups, as shown in Table III, we have identified that the model with fixed structural coefficients has a worse fit to the groups than the model with free structural coefficients. Thus, we found that the causal model is not invariant between the franchise and non-franchise groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct reliability</th>
<th>Convergent validity</th>
<th>Discriminant validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>CR ≥ 0.7</td>
<td>AVE ≥ 0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand equity (BE)</td>
<td>0.862</td>
<td>0.678</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived quality (PQ)</td>
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<td>0.783</td>
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<td>Brand trustworthiness (BT)</td>
<td>0.785</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived risk (PR)</td>
<td>0.862</td>
<td>0.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXQ (EX)</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention (PI)</td>
<td>0.852</td>
<td>0.591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Results of convergent and discriminant validity analyses.
4.2 Results

Figures 2 and 3 show the estimates of the structural coefficients, the weighting factors and the individual reliability of the items of the models, considering franchises and non-franchises. The significance of model parameters in the two groups was evaluated using the Z-test, with the parameters compared 2 to 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>CMIN</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>NFI Delta 1</th>
<th>IFI Delta 2</th>
<th>RFI $\rho_1$</th>
<th>RFI $\rho_2$</th>
<th>TLI $\rho_1$</th>
<th>TLI $\rho_2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurement weights</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16,111</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural weights</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52,054</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural covariances</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56,328</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural residuals</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>66,578</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement residuals</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>194,966</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Comparison between structural models (assuming the unconstrained model to be correct)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>CMIN</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>NFI Delta 1</th>
<th>IFI Delta 2</th>
<th>RFI $\rho_1$</th>
<th>RFI $\rho_2$</th>
<th>TLI $\rho_1$</th>
<th>TLI $\rho_2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural weights</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35,942</td>
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<td>0.003</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural covariances</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural residuals</td>
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<td>0.004</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement residuals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>178,855</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Comparison between structural models (assuming the measurement weights model to be correct)

Figure 2. Structural model for franchises
Considering the \( H1 \), we compared the trajectories of EXQ to brand equity of franchises vs non-franchises. The results indicated that \( BEXQ-BE(\text{non-franchise}) = 0.496 \) (SE = 0.059) and \( BEXQ-BE(\text{franchise}) = 0.646 \) (SE = 0.067). Thus, we did not observe the existence of a statistically significant difference between the analyzed trajectories \((Z = 1.669; \alpha = 0.05)\). That is, \( H1 \) was not supported.

Regarding the \( H2 \), we compared the trajectories of EXQ to perceived quality of franchises vs non-franchises. The results indicated that \( BEXQ-PQ(\text{non-franchise}) = 0.514 \) (SE = 0.055) and \( BEXQ-PQ(\text{franchise}) = 0.682 \) (SE = 0.063). Thus, we observed the existence of a statistically significant difference between the analyzed trajectories \((Z = 2.025; \alpha = 0.05)\). That is, the \( H2 \) was supported.

Considering the \( H3 \), we compared the trajectories of EXQ to brand trustworthiness of franchises vs non-franchises. The results indicated that \( BEXQ-BT(\text{non-franchise}) = 0.464 \) (SE = 0.050) and \( BEXQ-BT(\text{franchise}) = 0.696 \) (SE = 0.066). Thus, we observed the existence of a statistically significant difference between the analyzed trajectories \((Z = 2.806; \alpha = 0.05)\). That is, the \( H3 \) was supported.

With respect to the \( H4 \), we compared the trajectories of EXQ to Perceived Risk of franchises vs non-franchises. The results indicated that \( BEXQ-PR(\text{non-franchise}) = -0.249 \) (SE = 0.052) and \( BEXQ-PT(\text{franchise}) = -0.056 \) (SE = 0.46). Thus, we observed the existence of a statistically significant difference between the analyzed trajectories \((Z = 3.426; \alpha = 0.05)\). Despite the existence of statistical difference between the trajectories, \( H4 \) was not supported. This is because the results showed that the EXQ does not influence the perceptions of risk in franchises and negatively influences the perceptions of risk in non-franchises. In this way, we cannot say that the customer experience quality influences...
perceived risk on franchises less when compared to non-franchises, since the EXQ did not show any influence on the risk perceptions of franchise customers, since the BEXQ-PT (franchise) trajectory did not present statistical significance ($p = 0.224; \alpha = 0.05$).

Finally, considering the hypothesis $H_5$, we compared the trajectories of EXQ to purchase intention of franchises vs non-franchises. The results indicated that BEXQ-PI (non-franchise) = 0.536 (SE = 0.051) and BEXQ-PI (franchise) = 0.807 (SE = 0.68). Thus, we observed the existence of a statistically significant difference between the analyzed trajectories ($Z = 3.181; \alpha = 0.05$). That is, the $H_5$ was supported.

5. Discussion

The results discussed are based on purchasing experiences in which respondents were invited to recall and relive. Both for franchises (named as exclusive stores) and non-franchises (named multi-brand stores), we offered examples of operations from various retail segments, remembering mainly that non-franchises are companies that sell products of various brands, have local operations and in some cases have own production and franchises are stores that sell products of a single brand, usually have national or global operations and operate with standardized processes defined by the franchisor.

In general, by noting the influences of the customer experience quality on brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness, perceived risk and purchase intention in franchises and non-franchises, we have discovered that brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness and the purchase intention presented significant effects in both models of franchises and non-franchises. Perceived risk had a significant effect only on non-deductibles and the influence of EXQ on risk perception was not significant.

When comparing the influence of EXQ on brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness, perceived risk and purchase intention in franchises and non-franchises, we observed that the EXQ influenced brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness and purchase intention in franchises and non-franchises. The results showed support for three ($H_2$, $H_3$ and $H_5$) of the $H_5$ of this study in the comparison between franchises and non-franchises, indicating that EXQ influences perceived quality, brand trustworthiness and purchase intention more in franchises than in non-franchises. The lower influence of EXQ on the risk in franchises ($H_4$) was not evidenced, since the effect of EXQ on perceived risk was significant only in non-franchises. In the case of EXQ’s influence on brand equity ($H_1$) we found no significant differences in the “$Z$”-test, so we cannot affirm that EXQ influences the brand equity in franchises more when compared to non-franchises.

By analyzing $H_1$, both models presented positive and significant relationships acknowledging the impact of EXQ on brand equity. Complementing previous studies (Keller, 2016; Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin, 2014), the delivery of a good experience contributes to the creation of added value that the brand represents in the customer’s mind, directly impacting the market share and profitability in both franchises and non-franchises. As the comparison test did not present a significant result in the $Z$-test, we were not able to verify whether EXQ influences the brand equity in franchises more when compared to non-franchises. Thus, there is apparently no difference in the influence on brand equity between models. We then discovered that the EXQ influences the brand equity regardless of the type of store, i.e. in both franchises and non-franchises, when the customer lives a great experience in the various touchpoints with the store, brand equity is positively influenced (Homburg et al., 2015). EXQ seems to be an important indicator of brand equity because by living a positive experience, the additional value that the brand in franchises and non-franchises represents in the customer’s mind shows influence (Shamim et al., 2016). EXQ’s influence on a competitive franchise system gives franchises a strong brand representing performance improvement (Wu, 2015), but no more than in a non-franchise operation, where the EXQ result may be associated primarily with the point of sale, to the store and not
necessarily to the brands it represents. In the case of non-franchise, the brand in question tends to be the brand of the store and not of the products it sells.

When we analyze the perceived risk (H4), i.e. the security of the customer coming from the certainty that the company knows what it is doing (Klaus and Maklan, 2012), the results were different from our hypothesis. The influence of EXQ on perceived risk indicated a non-significant effect in the franchise model but significant in the non-franchise model, not supporting the hypothesis that the EXQ influences the risk perceived in franchises less when compared to non-franchises. The result showed that the EXQ influences the risk perceived only in non-franchises, reducing the perception of risk. Thus, although the franchises tend to demonstrate more security by their expertise with the brand, reflecting on the reliability (Chiu and Droge, 2015), EXQ tends not to influence perceived risk in this model. We find that customer experience quality does not necessarily reduce the risk perceived by the consumer in the purchase of franchise products/services and potentially the risk in franchises is influenced by other aspects, possibly because in franchises the brand alone already gives the customer more security and protection (Calvo-Porral and Lang, 2015). The significant result in the non-franchise model can be explained by the non-specialization in the brand (Wu, 2015) and consequently the need to transmit greater security at the time of purchase, as customers tend to consider that non-franchise purchases are potentially riskier than franchise stores, because non-franchises supposedly know less about the brands they trade when compared to franchises (Lin et al., 2014). The customer of non-franchises tends to feel some form of uncertainty or see the possibility of some negative consequence due to the purchase itself (Chiu and Droge, 2015). Thus, since consumers of non-franchises form their perceptions of risk from their own experiences, the higher the EXQ level, the lower the perceived risk.

One of the greatest effects found in our research was due to EXQ’s influence on brand trustworthiness in franchises. The comparison test also showed difference between franchises and non-franchises when we analyzed the influence of the EXQ. Considering the effect of EXQ on brand trustworthiness (H3), both franchises and non-franchises that have the ability to offer solutions to problems in dealing with customer needs, will generate trustworthiness, because the experience provided by both had a significant and positive effect on brand trustworthiness. But franchises that demonstrate good dealings with the customer in everyday relationship situations will increase the customer’s trust in the brand more than non-franchises. The reason for this result is probably because franchises can demonstrate more worthiness by conveying their expertise (Lu et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2016), offering products and services with standards focused on pre-established and tested processes in various locations (El Akremi et al., 2015). Franchises act as references in the market, presenting consistency in the projection of new experiences, stimulating brand trustworthiness (Homburg et al., 2015). The franchise’s commitment to keep its promises (Morhart et al., 2015), influenced by EXQ, collaborates in the creation of emotional bonds (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) with the customer leading to a better relationship with the brand, thereby increasing trustworthiness.

Another expected result was the influence of EXQ on perceived quality (H2), confirmed both in franchises and in non-franchises, in line with the study by Klaus and Maklan (2012). Our comparison test supported the hypothesis of this study that EXQ tends to influence the perceived quality in franchises more when compared to non-franchises. The perceived quality of a certain product delivered by a franchise tends to be higher when compared to non-franchise (Lam and Shankar, 2014), whereas franchises manage the customer experience quality primarily by considering their cultural mindset (Homburg et al., 2015). The EXQ seems to be an important indicator of perceived quality because by living a positive experience, the customer tends to raise their judgment about products or services of franchises more than in non-franchises regarding their excellence or superiority (Snoj et al., 2004).
Finally, the greatest effect found in our research was the influence of EXQ on the purchase intention in franchises. The comparison test also showed one of the largest differences between franchises and non-franchises. Both franchises and non-franchises, while offering a quality experience, tend to influence the customer’s purchase intention. Given that the process of forming purchase intention occurs through a broad set of customer touchpoints with the store (Klaus and Maklan, 2012), franchises and non-franchises that encourage the customer to relive the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase journey (Homburg et al., 2015) contributing to influencing the purchase intention. However, this influence tends to be higher in the case of franchises. Thus, our study supports the hypothesis that customer experience quality positively influences the purchase intention for consumers on franchises more when compared to non-franchises (H5). The reason for this result is probably because in franchising more often occurs the renewal of the patterns of experiences provided to the client (Lin et al., 2014), with the aim of highlighting the relevance of sensory and affective stimulation actions in the clients’ purchase intention (Homburg et al., 2015).

In summary, in comparing the influence of the customer experience quality on traditional marketing constructs, the purchase intention appears to be the most impacted in franchises, with the biggest difference when compared to non-franchises, indicating the importance of managing the client’s journey and their touchpoints. The point of attention for non-franchises was the difference of impact in the influence of the EXQ in the perceived risk, reinforcing the need to transmit more security in the act of purchasing than the franchises. Brand trustworthiness showed that franchises that relate better to their customers will increase brand trustworthiness more than non-franchise. EXQ influences the brand equity regardless of the type of retail and finally, the perception of quality of a certain product delivered by the franchise tends to increase more when compared to non-franchises.

6. Conclusion
As conclusions for the study, we find that developing the customer experience quality on franchises may result in increased brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness and purchase intention. In the comparison between franchises and non-franchises, the results show that franchise customers have a better purchase intention, by giving indications of better quality and brand trustworthiness when compared to non-franchises. This comparison shows indications of the competitive advantage of franchises over non-franchises, justifying the investments that market companies have been making in the development of new franchise networks.

Our research empirically tested the EXQ scale, expanding understanding of the influence of the customer experience quality, investigating its impact in the context of franchises and non-franchises in relation to traditional constructs systematically studied (Klaus and Maklan, 2012; Kashif et al., 2016). The results contribute to the understanding of the impact of the customer’s experience quality on brand equity, perceived quality, brand trustworthiness, perceived risk and purchase intention that directly affects the performance of franchises and non-franchises, expanding the literature of these business models (Jean Jeon et al., 2014; El Akremi et al., 2015; Wu, 2015). We can highlight that the comparison made was the main novelty of this study, since current literature tends to treat franchises rather than franchises separately, not making comparisons, such as the one performed here.

6.1 Implications for franchises
For franchise managers, the study points out guidelines on the customer experience quality in this model: First, as the added value that the brand in franchises represents in the customer’s mind has demonstrated impact along with the influence of EXQ, we recommend that franchises focus on providing good experiences, because they tend to increase the perceived brand equity. Second, as EXQ influences the perceived quality in franchises more
when compared to non-franchises, franchise managers must create more touchpoints that provide the customer to live a positive experience because the customer tends to raise their judgment about products or services.

Third, franchise managers who show commitment to keep their promises, as well as a good deal with the customer, will increase brand trustworthiness more than in non-franchises. Therefore, in order to develop the relationship with the client, the training of the teams in the franchise networks shows relevance. Finally, by providing a customer experience quality by renewing its standards and highlighting actions of sensory and affective stimulation, we show that franchise managers can increase the customer’s purchase intention.

6.2 Implications for non-franchises

For managers of non-franchises, first, as the result showed that the EXQ influences the perceived risk only in non-franchises, there is a need for managers to transmit greater assurance at the time of purchase, as customers tend to consider that non-franchise purchases are potentially riskier than in franchise stores. Thus, since consumers of non-franchises form their perception of risk based on their own experiences, the manager of this model should be concerned with raising the level of experience to reduce perceived risk.

Second, we show that regardless of the type of retail the impact of the customer experience quality on brand equity is positive and can be an ally to build their store’s brand.

Third, non-franchise managers can stimulate good customer relations in everyday situations, as they will increase the customer’s trust in the brand. Even though this type of store does not naturally possess the expertise of a strong brand, the impact of the EXQ was positive, although with a smaller effect than what happens in the franchises. Forth, the EXQ seems to be an important indicator of perceived quality, because even in non-franchises, when living a positive experience, the customer tends to raise their judgment about the products.

Finally, no franchises can focus on strategies in customer experience quality, seeking to develop a cultural mindset, designing the client’s journey and listing touchpoints, because we showed that the purchase intention was the most impacted item in the non-franchise model.

6.3 Limitations and future researches

This research presents limitations because it does not segment the different types of franchises such as service, food, men’s and women’s fashion, cosmetics, with this being the first recommendation for further studies. Moreover, it is worth emphasizing the role of the customer experience quality in an emerging market as antecedent of purchase intention in franchises, something that we can investigate in depth in new research and other emerging markets, making comparisons between developing countries.

We emphasize that customer experience quality surveys still require further development, since the contact of the customer with the various types of store has appeared to be a relevant element to generate purchases and loyalty. Thus, advancing the knowledge about the EXQ can bring varied theoretical and practical contributions, with the study here carried out being a sample of the importance of the of the customer experience quality in retail in general.

References


Further reading


Appendix

Constructs and variables adapted to questionnaires. For franchises, follow as below and for non-franchises consider exchange exclusive brand stores to multi-brand stores:

1. **Brand equity** (Yoo et al., 2000):
   - It makes sense to shop in exclusive brand stores instead of multi-brand stores, even if they sell the same products (BE1).
   - Even if a multi-brand store has the same characteristics as an exclusive brand store, I would rather purchase at the exclusive brand store (BE2).
   - Even if there is a multi-brand store as good as an exclusive brand store, I would rather shop at the exclusive brand store (BE3).
• Even though a multi-brand store is no different from an exclusive brand store in any sense, it seems to me smarter to shop at the exclusive brand store (BE4).

(2) Perceived quality (Grewal et al., 1998):
• Products of exclusive brand stores seem to me to be of good quality (PQ1).
• Products of exclusive brand stores seem to me to be durable (PQ2).
• Products of exclusive brand stores seem to be safe (PQ3).
• Products of exclusive brand stores seem to be reliable (PQ4).
• I see the products of exclusive brand stores as being of high quality (PQ5).
• I see the exclusive brand stores in a positive way (PQ6).
• In my view, the quality of the products of exclusive brand stores is good (PQ7).
• Compared to multi-brand stores, I am convinced that a product from an exclusive brand store will serve me better (PQ8).

(3) Brand trustworthiness (Erdem and Swait, 2004):
• I believe that exclusive brand stores deliver what they promise (BT1).
• I rely on exclusive brand store products (BT2).
• Over time, my experiences with exclusive stores have led me to believe that they keep their promises (BT3).
• In my view, exclusive brand stores have names that convey trust (BT4).
• I see that in general, exclusive brand stores do not pretend to be what they are not (BT5).

(4) Perceived risk (Laroche et al., 2005):
• I think I would make a mistake if I bought a product in an exclusive brand store (PR1).
• I have the feeling that if I purchased in exclusive brand stores I would have a lot of problems (PR2).
• I think I might risk being frustrated if in the next few months I purchase in exclusive brand stores (PR3).
• For me, shopping in exclusive brand stores is risky (PR4).

(5) EXQ (Klaus and Maklan, 2012):
• I rely on exclusive brand stores because they know what they are doing (EXQ1).
• Purchasing from exclusive brand stores is usually easy because they take care of every detail (EXQ2).
• It is not just at the time of the sale; the exclusive brand stores will worry about me for a long time (EXQ3).
• In exclusive brand stores, if I am already a customer, they know me and care about me, so I see no point in buying elsewhere (EXQ4).
• In exclusive brand stores, if I have already purchased from them before, then I get better purchasing conditions (EXQ5).
• I choose exclusive branded stores because they help me choose by offering good advice (EXQ6).

(6) Purchase intention (Dodds et al., 1991):
• The likelihood of me purchasing from an exclusive brand store is very high (PI1).
When I think about purchasing at an exclusive brand store, I do not think about the price being paid (PI2).

If I were to think only of price, I would not consider purchasing a product in an exclusive brand store (PI3).

It is very likely that I will purchase products from an exclusive brand store (PI4).

My desire to shop at an exclusive brand store is very high (PI5).

If I were to purchase a product, maybe I would purchase it at an exclusive brand store (PI6).

I would definitely purchase from an exclusive brand store (PI7).

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