

## **I read about you and now I'm convinced to buy your store brand tourism package**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** –. The aim of the research is to identify the personal characteristics of the individual that contribute to the formation of a favourable attitude towards the services provided by the distributor travel agency, and that, as a consequence of this, the probability of trading with it is increased.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study targeted 608 Spanish individuals to conduct an empirical analysis using structural equations.

**Findings** – The attitude towards the SB travel agency services is positively influenced by the relevance for the individual to look for information about new products with SB, how relevant is others opinion for him/her, and his/her motivation to search for different prices before making the purchase decision. Among those variables, the most influential in the attitude is the opinion seeking (look for SB information among peers), and the less one is the price search motivation, with a very low influence, although significant.

**Keywords:** store brands travel services, attitude, influence information, normative influence, price search motivation

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## Introduction

Worldwide, the tourism industry contributed directly by 3,1% to the global GDP in 2014 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015) while in Spain it represented 11,7% of the Spanish GDP (EXCELTUR, 2016); therefore, it is one of the main sectors of Spanish economy and with growing expectations, what makes it interesting to invest in this sector, and so, its study. Major changes are challenging the tourism channel industry, some of them as a consequence of internet progress, in which we highlight the customer' bargaining power, as consumers can now compare services and prices, make bookings and complete their purchase without intermediaries, the increase of social media influence through online reviews, and because it makes easier the information exchange (e.g. Tsao et al, 2015).

In 2006, with the entry into force of the Bolkestein European directive of the 12th of December, 2006 (European Union Official Journal, 2006) the services were liberalized in the European Union, allowing the sale of tourism services by any establishment. This directive makes it easier for large retailers including tourism services in their commercial offer, ~~with no need to become a travel agency~~. The tourism services offer, under the brand name of the retailer (store brand - SB), adds to the trend of offering other services, such as financial, insurance or mobile phone services, by large retailers; it is the result of a brand extension strategy that retailers are developing. Although retailers like Carrefour, Auchan, Lidl or El Corte Inglés (Spanish retailer) include in their services the offer of SB tourism services under the umbrella of the retailer agency, the number of retailers offering such services is still relatively low.

While the literature referred to the SB is abundant, it is relatively little the one that refers to the extension of the SB to new categories of products and especially to services (Boisvert and Ashill, 2011; Laforet, 2007; Zboja and Voorhess, 2006) The knowledge developed in this field does not have to be equally applicable to services, with very particular characteristics (Vahie and Paswan, 2006; Jin and Suh, 2005), and specifically to tourism services, which have a meaning and importance for the consumer very different from physical products, implying, among other features, a high experiential degree. This study aims to contribute to the development of knowledge of the SB broadly, in line with what was proposed by Gooner and Nadler (2012).

Consumers could be reluctant to adopt this new SB tourism services; attending the previous literature of SB in the context of products, consumer attitude toward SB is the most important variable due to its positive influence on SB purchase decision (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). A SB is considered successful not only when it gains a favorable consumer perception, but more importantly when it leads to strong purchase intentions.

The development of a favorable attitude towards the SB travel agency becomes a key objective for the distributor, being necessary to identify those variables that can act as antecedents in creating a favorable attitude towards these new services. In this paper we have three assumptions: 1) the brand strategy developed by retailers to offer tourist services is the brand extension, 2) we argue that this extension is perceived by the consumer as a novelty so the precepts of Innovation Diffusion Theory apply, and that 3) according to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) an individual behavioral intention is jointly determined by his/her attitude and subjective norms (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ho, 2014). Considering all this, and for a first approach to the field of SB travel agency services the variables that are being analyzed are: the attitude towards SB travel agency services and the interpersonal influences. Likewise, we include the importance of price to the consumer, because of the relevance that the price has in the field of SBs and its usefulness in the previous comparison to the purchase of tourism services. Related with tourism services there are many online platforms that allow consumers, without great effort, the price comparison, such as Trivago.

The aim of the research is to highlight the personal characteristics of the individual that can contribute to the creation of a favorable attitude towards the services provided by the travel agency of the retailer and, therefore, increase the likelihood of contracting it. In particular we will consider personal influences, distinguishing between the importance for the individual of seeking information among their acquaintances about new offers with SB (opinion seeking), the importance he/she gives to the opinion of others (normative influence), and the importance that the price variable has for the consumer, measured as the individual's motivation for seeking different prices, all in the course of the extension of the SB to the offer of tourism services.

In order to gather information to test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted among 608 individuals. The scales used in the questionnaire were taken from previous studies and adapted for our purposes. The data analysis method used in this study is Structural Equation Model.

## **2. Conceptual framework and research propositions**

### *2.1 Attitude toward SB travel agency services*

Burton et al. (1998) define SB attitude as a consumer's favorable or unfavorable predisposition towards SB. In line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991; Azjen and Fishbein 1980), attitudes have been shown to strongly impact purchasing behaviors and intentions in various contexts.

In the literature about brand extension, attitude is one of the most important variables to explain the acceptance of brand extension (e.g. Martinez and Chernatony, 2004). In the area of services, the attitude towards the brand has a positive influence on purchase intention of new services (Boisvert and Ashill, 2011). Additionally, in the context of SB products attitude toward SB has received a lot of attention due to its positive influence on consumers SB purchase decision (eg Dick et al., 1996; Zielke and Dobbstein, 2007). Then we expect that SB attitude toward SB travel agency services can explain the acceptance of these new services. Therefore:

**H1.** A better attitude towards the SB travel agency services increases the likelihood of contracting a travel service in a SB travel agency

### *2.2 Interpersonal influence: Opinion seeking and normative influence*

An important determinant of an individual's behavior is others' influence. The individual susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a general trait and varies across persons. Interpersonal influence plays an important role in forming and changing attitudes, and it conditions the buying behavior of the consumer, especially in social situations (Bearden et al, 1989; McCarthy et al., 2001). The literature that analyzes the factors that affect, both, the process of adopting a new product/service and the acceptance of the extension of a brand highlights the importance of personal influences (e.g. Yu, 2008).

When analyzing the personal influences, two dimensions, called informational influences and normative influences, are identified, and result in the acquisition or not of the new product, according to the information obtained and in accordance with the expectations of others (Bearden et al., 1989).

The informational influences dimension refers to the individual's own tendency for looking for information in order to increase awareness of the product or service, brand or store (Bearden et al., 1989; Chu and Kim, 2011). Nowadays, the electronic word of mouth (eWom) has become, especially among young people, one of the main sources of information,

consulted especially in the field of tourism and with greatest influence. By eWom we understand the act of exchanging marketing information via the Internet among consumers (Chu and Kim, 2011, pp.48) and it plays an essential role in the formation and change of attitudes (Lee et al., 2009) and in the process of decision (eg. Gilly et al, 1998; Bruny and Lilien, 2008).

Just as Chu and Kim (2011) establish in their paper, susceptible individuals to the informational influences show a greater need for advice and guidance from their contacts when they are immersed in the purchase decision process. Individuals who exhibit this behavior can be classified as opinion seekers.

The opinion seekers are those individuals who rely on what has been published by their contacts and come to them in order to acquire more knowledge about a new product, service or brand.

In general, the attitude of consumers towards the brand of the distributor has substantially improved and they show a greater willingness to try new products with SB (eg. Zielke and Dobelstein, 2007), as a consequence of the efforts of retailers to improve the quality and offer of their products and greater consumer familiarity with the SB. Considering the favorable image that people have of the SB in general, those individuals who come to their contacts for information related to new products or services of SB for the formation of their attitudes towards a new offer of the retailer, will develop a more favorable attitude to the services provided by the travel agency of the retailer in turn and they will be more likely to engage with it. Thus, we propose two hypotheses:

**H2.** A higher motivation to look for information about the SBs (opinion seeking), a better attitude towards the SB travel agency

**H3.** A higher motivation to look for information about the SBs increases the likelihood to contract a travel service with the SB travel agency

Moreover, the normative influence refers to the tendency of consumers to make their decisions based on the expectations of others' opinion and affects attitudes, norms and values (Bearden et al 1989; Chu and Kim, 2011; Ho, 20014; Yu, 2008) in order to earn some reward or avoid penalties. The Normative influence controls the evaluation and selection of products or brands made by the individual in order that these are consistent with the expectations of the other group members and reduces the individual's independence when evaluating the information sought (Hirschman, 1980). The image of the SB has substantially improved over time to the point that in certain categories are considered as the best alternative; the fact that the consumer feel influenced by the opinion that others may have of him based on the name of the agency in which he/she hires the tourist services, will influence on the attitude. To the extent that the opinion of the others is in favor of the acquisition of SB, the individual's attitude, in particular towards SB travel agency, will be better. Thus:

**H4.** A higher influence of other's opinion, a better attitude towards the SB travel agency

### *2.3 Search price motivation*

The differentiation in the services sector is complex and plays an important role retailer's ability to offer a different value proposition and according to the expectations of their customers. In the case that concerns us, it can get to the point that the main differences among the tourist services provided by the mass retailer over other suppliers are brand (supplier), price, offer exclusive products under the name of the banner and additional services.

While the price of a product is the same for all consumers, not all of them value it equally, consumers show different behaviors depending on the importance they accorded to the price

variable in their decision process. *Price importance* is defined as “the price's relative weight as a decision making factor in the buying decision process and captures the customer's focus on paying a low purchasing price” (Homburg, Allmann and Klarmann, 2014, pp. 1581) and likely drives the price search. Price consciousness indicates the extent to which consumers are concerned with price convenience and making deals when shopping (eg Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer 1993). Prior research indicates that price consciousness reveals consumers’ orientation to involve in price search for comparing them, their effort to gain information in order to identify the better prices (Ailawadi, Neslin and Gedenk, 2001) and affect the formation of attitudes (JinandSuh, 2005). The appearance of prices comparator platforms in the tourism sector, like Trivago, contribute to decrease effort to be made by the consumer. Traditionally the most obvious benefit to consumers buying SB is their lower prices (Baltas, 1997; BatraandSinha, 2000; Burton et al., 1998). In the case of product categories where individual perceives greater risk (as it is in travel services), consumer is more price consciousness (Sinha and Batra, 1999) and it is motivated to search information about prices. Particularly to services, the long or indefinite time horizon of service delivery and the potential for inconsistent performance in meeting expectations contribute to a high level of uncertainty (Parasuram, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988).

If the price information obtained confirms that the prices offered by the agency of the distributor are lower than those offered by other travel agencies, attitude towards this agency will be better. Attending that:

**H5.** A higher price search motivation, a higher likelihood to contract a travel service with the SB travel agency

### 3. Methodology

A structured questionnaire was designed to gather the information for testing the hypotheses. The questionnaire, as mentioned, focused on the study of SB extension to travel services. The sample consisted of 608 individuals, aged between 18 and 70 years and living in Spain, who fit two criteria: individuals with a monthly salary of at least 1,200 Euro and who had traveled abroad for at least five days during the previous year. The quantitative approach allows us a better generalization of results. Participants were surveyed by a nationwide online panel under the management of a professional market research institute.

Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the final sample, 60.4% were male, and 39.6% female; the average age was 42.8 years; table 1 shows the distribution of the sample in terms of the family unit income.

Table 1: Sample family unit income

INCOME	PERCENTAJE
1100 - 2100 euros month	30,1
2101 - 3000 euros month	35,2
More than 3000 euros month	34,7

Scales used in the structured questionnaire are shown in table 2. All of them were taken from previous studies and adapted to match our purposes. All constructs were measured according to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree).

Regarding those questions related specifically to SB, participants were proposed a situation in which their current hypermarket or supermarket would offer travel services (if the retailer didn’t already offer such services). Before testing the hypotheses, the psychometric properties

of the measurement scales were confirmed by running CFA with EQS 6.1. The model was tested through Structural Equation Modeling using EQS 6.1.

Table 2: Scales used in the research

CONSTRUCT	SOURCE
General attitude towards the SB travel agency	Adapted from Burton et al (1998)
Opinion seeking (look for SB information)	Chu and Kim (2011)
Normative influence (other's opinion consideration)	Chu and Kim (2011)
Price search motivation	Adapted from Alaiwadi et al (2001), Lichtenstein et al (1998) and Manzur et al (2011)
Likelihood of contracting a travel service in a SB travel agency	Boisvert and Ashill (2011)

### 3.1 Psychometric properties of the scales

Before testing the hypotheses (the theoretical model), a confirmatory factor analysis for the latent variables was undertaken. As table 3 shows, the convergent validity was tested by checking that all items had significant factorial loads higher than 0.60 and were significant (Bagozzi and Baumgartner, 1994; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Moreover, and related to the reliability, all the Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) were greater than the recommended value 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978; Churchill, 1979). Two other indicators were calculated for overcoming the limitations of the Cronbach's alpha (table 3): the Composite reliability index (whose value is recommended to be higher than 0.7 - Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and the Average variance extracted (recommended value higher to 0.5 - Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The joint analysis of these three indicators, showed an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 3: Reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model

Factor	Item	Convergent Validity		Reliability		
		Loading (t)	Average loading	Cronbach $\alpha$	CR	AVE
F1 ATTITUDE TOWARDS SB TRAVEL AGENCY (ATT)	att1	.85(25.21)		.93	0.93	.69
	att2	.85 (25.52)				
	att3	.85 (25.983)				
	att4	.75 (17.14)	.83			
	att5	.82 (21.53)				
	att6	.86 (22.08)				
F2 OPINION SEEKING (OPI)	opi1	.88 (30.79)		.91	0.91	.76
	opi2	.90 (37.52)	.87			
	opi3	.84 (28.83)				

F3 NORMATIVE INFLUENCE (NOR)	nor1	.87 (27.37)				
	nor2	.90 (31.12)	.87	.90	0.90	.76
	nor3	.84 (25.90)				
F4 PRICE SEARCH MOTIVATION (PRI)	pri1	.89 (15.40)				
	pri2	.83 (15.55)	.87	.91	.90	.75
	pri3	.88 (16.47)				
F5 LIKELIHOOD TO CONTRACT IN A SB TRAVEL AGENCY (INT)	lik1	.97 (33.83)				
	lik2	.93 (30.51)	.95	.95	.95	.90

$\alpha^2$  (109 dg) = 213.71 ( $p < 0,00$ ); BBNFI=.964; BBNNFI=.978; CFI=.982; IFI=.982; MFI = .904  
RMSEA=.043

Note: CR=Composite Reliability; AVE= Average Variance Extracted

For analysing the discriminant validity, two procedures were applied: (a) test that the confidence interval for the estimation of the correlation between each pair of factors does not include the unit (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) and (b) test that the average extracted variance, for each factor, is greater than the squared of the correlation between each pair of factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As table 4 reports, the measurement instruments had discriminant validity as all recommended values were reached.

Table 4: Discriminant validity of measurement model

	F1.- ATT	F2.- OPI	F3.- NOR	F4.- PRI	F5.- LIK
F1.- ATT	<b>.69</b>	.28	.24	.00	.51
F2.- OPI	[.60; .46]	<b>.76</b>	.41	.00	.12
F3.- NOR	[.57; .42]	[.70; .58]	<b>.76</b>	.01	.10
F4.- PRI	[.13; -.06]	[.02; -.17]	[-.02; -.21]	<b>.75</b>	.01
F5.- LIK	[.76; .67]	[.43; .26]	[.40; .23]	[.17; -.01]	<b>.90</b>

Under the diagonal: confidence interval for the correlation between each pair of factors

Diagonal: average extracted variance

Over the diagonal: squared of the correlation between each pair of factors

#### 4. Results

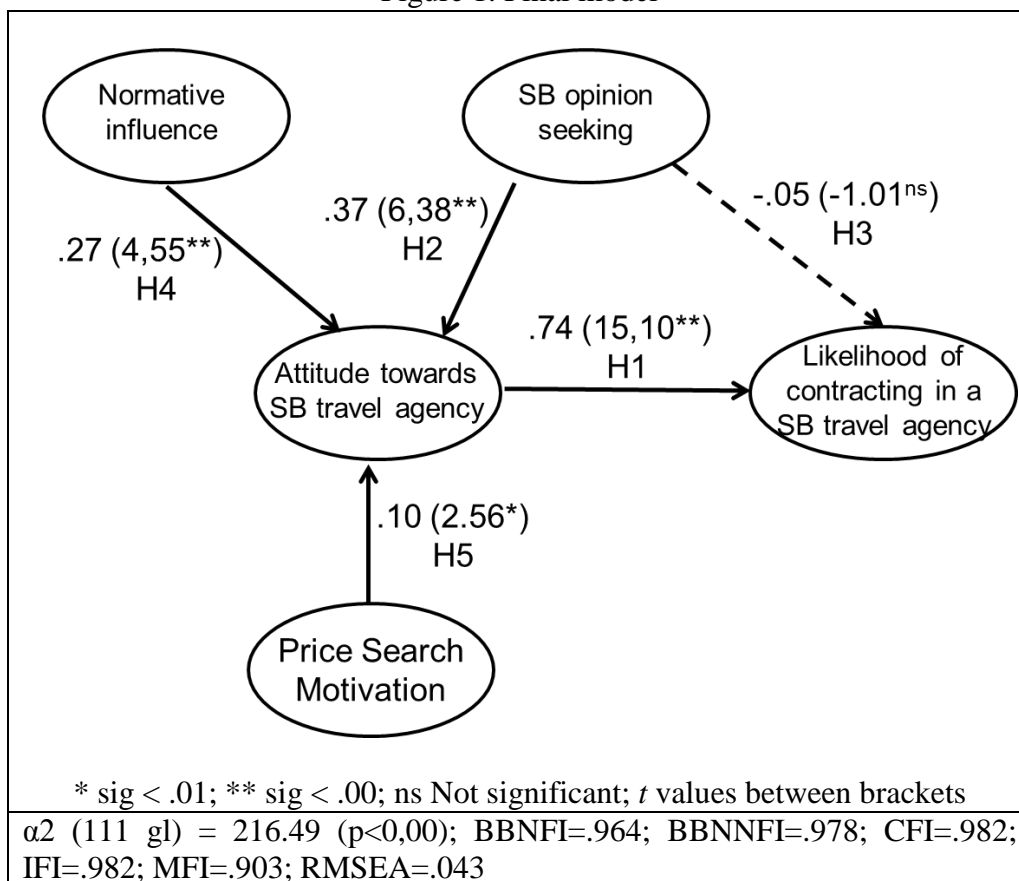
Results are shown in Figure 1. All the proposed hypotheses are accepted, except for H3.

As literature repeatedly has supported, intention is highly influenced by attitude: A better attitude towards the SB travel agency increases the likelihood of contracting a travel service in a SB travel agency.

The attitude towards the SB travel agency is positively influenced by the relevance for the individual to look for information about products with SB (H2), how relevant is others opinion for him/her (H3), and his/her motivation to search for different prices before making the purchase decision (H4). Among those variables, the most influential in the attitude is the opinion seeking (look for SB information), and the less one is the price search motivation, with a very low influence, although significant.

As mentioned, the relevance for the individual to look for information about products with SB has no significant influence in the likelihood of contracting in a SB travel agency (H3).

Figure 1. Final model



## 5. Discussion



The tourism sector, and in particular the travel agencies, are being affected by multiple factors among which we mention the development of the Internet, with all its implications at different levels, the use of eWom as one of the main sources of information, and the entry of new competitors, due in part to the development of the online market; among those competitors we can identify the mass retailers, who are using a brand extension strategy to extend its brand to tourism services.

In our opinion, some of the main reasons that make it attractive for the mass retailer offering SB tourism services are: 1) in Europe there has been change regulations that facilitate the introduction in this sector without having to become a travel agency, 2) the high degree of knowledge and proximity that has the mass retailer about its customers, 3) the greater familiarity with the SB by the consumer and the substantial improvement in the overall image of the SBs and 4) the possibility to have a multichannel strategy which allows them to distribute their products both offline and online.

The existing literature related to the extension of the SB to services is scarce or practically non-existent in regards to tourism services, making it necessary the development of knowledge from existing one.

In this first approach to the field of study we analyze the personal influences in shaping attitudes about the new mass retailers offering regarding SB tourism services, since in the field of both convenience products as well as durables, attitude is a key factor in explaining the acquisition SB products; so, it results interesting for the distributor those factors that contribute to the formation of a favourable attitude towards the offering of these new services. This paper supports that personal influences in its two dimensions, a) the tendency of individual search of opinions of their acquaintances about the new offer of SB tourism services and b) the importance given to the opinion they may have of him if he buy the services of the SB travel agency, contribute to the formation of the individual's attitude toward the SB tourism services, and in a positive sense. So we can conclude that it is possible to find positive opinion about SB and that the image that the rest of the group can held from the individual because of buying the new SB service has not to be negative, what comes to support the improved opinion on the SB. This positive attitude has a direct and positive effect on the intention to buy the SB tourism services, as literature on the SB in other product categories has supported.

Moreover, it has also been found that those individuals most involved in the search and comparison of prices, show a more favourable attitude towards the SB tourism services.

Our findings suggest that mass retailers who want to extend their brands into tourism need to develop positive Wom. This will favor by a seeking information in social media in adopting consumer decisions. In tourism this is critical because the salient influence of online reviews (Chu and Kim, 2011). Likewise managers tend to develop a positive image towards SB.

Our findings raise several issues for future research, in part motivated by some limitations present in this study. In this paper only personal influence and price have been considered. A deeper analysis is needed in order to include other variables like familiarity, trust or quality perceived that can contribute to the attitude formation and opinion developing. Furthermore our results can be biased due to the strong influence of the main player (El Corte Ingles Tours) which has a high level of perceived quality and trust. Therefore we propose to test this model in other countries where the players would have a similar market share and influence in consumer decision.

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## Appendix

### Scales used in the research

<b>General attitude towards the SB travel agency services</b>	
Contract the services of a SB Travel Agency makes me feel good.	Burton, S., Lichtenstein, D., Netemeyer, R., & Garretson, J. (1998)
I love it when SB are available for the travel services I contract	
For this service, the best buy is usually through the SB travel agency.	
In general, the SB travel agency services is good-quality	
Considering value for the money, I prefer the Sb travel services to others	
When I contract the SB travel agency services I feel that I am getting a good deal	
<b>Opinion seeking</b>	
When I consider new SB products, I ask my contacts for advice	(Chu & Kim, 2011)
I like to get my contacts' opinions before I buy new SB products	
I feel more comfortable choosing new SB products when I have gotten my contacts' opinions on them	
<b>Normative influence</b>	
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve	(Chu & Kim, 2011)
If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	
<b>Price search motivation</b>	
I compare prices of at least a few brands before I choose one.	Adapted from Alaiwadi et al (2001), Lichtenstein et al (1998)and Manzur et al (2011)
I find myself checking the prices even for small items.	
When shopping, I compare the prices of different brands to be sure I get the best value for the money	