

# Females' customer engagement with eco-friendly restaurants in Instagram: the role of past visits

Females'  
customer  
engagement

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to examine the effect on the customer brand engagement (CBE) of followers of an eco-friendly restaurant of their perceptions of the originality of the firm-generated content posted online by the restaurant and the effect of CBE on brand advocacy and behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant, paying special attention to the moderating role of past visits to the restaurant.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling with a sample of 491 female Instagram users who follow the online account of a particular eco-friendly dining establishment. Two group comparisons were conducted to test the moderating effects in relationships between CBE and consumer-brand interactions (behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant and brand advocacy).

**Findings** – Followers' perceptions of the originality of the material posted by the eco-friendly restaurant had a positive influence on CBE which, in turn, affected brand advocacy and behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant. Past visits moderated the relationship between CBE and consumer-brand interactions.

**Practical implications** – This study offers restaurants an understanding of how to develop marketing strategies targeted at females on visual-based social networks; it is shown that original posts encourage favourable responses, such as CBE, brand advocacy and behavioural intentions. Managers should organise events and invite their female followers to visit the restaurant.

**Originality/value** – This study adds to the knowledge about customer engagement by explaining how firm-generated content posted on Instagram drives CBE and provides specific suggestions as to how restauranters might engage online with their clients. This study goes beyond direct effects and analyses the moderating role of past visits to the restaurant on the relationships between CBE and consumer-brand interactions (visiting intentions and brand advocacy).

**Keywords** Perceived originality, Customer brand engagement, Brand advocacy, Past visits, Eco-friendly restaurants

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism companies have increased their use of social media, which has prompted firms and consumers to focus strongly on the potential of the media



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(Gruss *et al.*, 2020). Colicev *et al.* (2019) argued that not enough is known about how firm-generated content (FGC) and user-generated content (UGC) influence the phases of the marketing funnel. Most previous studies have focused on UGC (Park *et al.*, 2021); FGC has been examined less, despite its role in the establishment of firm–consumer bonds (Poulis *et al.*, 2019). The characteristics of the FGC posted on official Instagram accounts may affect the consumer’s perceptions of brands. Creativity and uniqueness seem crucial in making content posted on Instagram appealing (Casaló *et al.*, 2020). Lee and Tao (2021) showed how Instagram can be used as a promotional tool by chefs to demonstrate their creativity and originality by sharing their culinary secrets.

The theoretical and practical importance of customer brand engagement (CBE) has prompted the hospitality literature to focus on it more (So and Li, 2020). So *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that CBE improves consumers’ brand evaluations, and Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) demonstrated that it positively affects purchase intentions. However, the mediating and moderating effects of other variables on the relationship between CBE and behavioural intentions merit further investigation (Gruss *et al.*, 2020).

Past visits increase the customer’s knowledge about a restaurant and evoke positive attitudes towards brands (de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2018). However, the literature fails adequately to explain the effect of past visits as a moderator between CBE and its consequences. A review of the relevant literature suggests that the present study is, to date, the first to analyse the role of CBE in influencing brand advocacy and future purchase intentions by examining previous visits to the restaurant as a moderator. Hence, past visits emerge as important, and introducing them as a moderator in the proposed framework helps provide a holistic view of several significant linkages, that is, between CBE, brand advocacy and behavioural intentions.

Instagram seems to make its viewers react and behave differently to how they respond to other social network sites (SNS); its FGC seems to prompt them to make more frequent purchases and be more engaged (Casaló *et al.*, 2020). Previous studies have focused on its users’ motives for using Instagram (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016) and the causes of consumer–brand exchanges on companies’/brands’ official Instagram accounts (Casaló *et al.*, 2017). However, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, the effect of FGC posted on Instagram on the specific dimensions of CBE remains underexplored.

For restaurants, social media have become critical marketing channels; most establishments are of relatively small size and function independently; thus, they do not have the financial wherewithal to use more costly means of communication (Gruss *et al.*, 2020). The content posted by restaurants on Instagram enables them to reach a wide audience, to improve consumers’ attitudes towards them and, because of the insubstantial nature of the product, can significantly influence potential clients (Kim and Tang, 2016). In terms of CBE, visual-based social media have become an integral part of many restaurants’ strategies. The increasing importance of Instagram and its growing adoption by restaurants suggests that efforts should be made to better understand what generates CBE on this platform.

The present study represents a real contribution to the academic corpus, as it is – to the best of the authors’ knowledge – a pioneer in analysing how the dimensions (cognitive, affective and behavioural) of CBE with a restaurant’s Instagram account act as drivers of intentions to visit the restaurant and of increased brand advocacy. Unlike previous studies, this paper goes further than analysing the direct effects of CBE on behavioural intentions, considering:

- the moderating role of past visits on the relationships between CBE dimensions, brand advocacy and behavioural intentions; and
- the mediating effects of brand advocacy on the relationships between the CBE dimensions and visit intentions.

This research also provides interesting results that highlight the impact of the originality of FGC on the dimensions of CBE with a dining establishment's official online Instagram account.

Taking the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) model (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) as a base, the present study examines the process through which Instagram-based FGC affects behavioural intentions through CBE: the originality of the FGC is used here as the stimuli. It is proposed that the stimuli evoke cognitive, affective and behavioural engagement in readers/viewers. An analysis of this process can provide greater understanding of the nature of Instagram follower–brand relationships. Finally, CBE dimensions prompt users to respond, that is, through brand advocacy and visit intentions. Brand advocacy and visit intentions are very significant variables – elevated brand advocacy is an indicator of brand power (Bhati and Verma, 2020), and visit intentions play a pivotal role in consumers' subsequent behaviours (Aureliano-Silva *et al.*, 2021).

This study focuses on eco-friendly restaurants. Eco-friendly restaurants try to function in way that is consistent with environmentally sustainable values, in particular, by minimising the effect of their operations on their environs and on the world in general. Because of increasing consumer health awareness and enthusiasm for organic products (Rodríguez-López *et al.*, 2020), eco-friendly restaurants have become relatively iconic in the field. In addition, women are the target population. Men and women have been shown, in the broadest sense, to like different foods (Shin and Mattila, 2019). Women normally choose to eat healthier food (Azzurra *et al.*, 2019) and post more content about healthy food topics in SNS than do men (Gil-Quintana *et al.*, 2021).

The present study adds to the knowledge about customer engagement and provides specific suggestions as to how restaurateurs might engage online with their clients. The aim of the present study is threefold:

- (1) to expand the knowledge of how to improve long-term follower–brand relationships, via brand advocacy and visit intentions, through CBE dimensions;
- (2) to analyse the moderating impact of past visits on the relationships between CBE, brand advocacy and visit intentions; and
- (3) to analyse how the perceptions that followers hold about the originality of FGC can drive CBE.

## Literature review and hypotheses development

### *Dimensions of customer brand engagement*

In this study, CBE is defined as “a consumer's positively-valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related activity during or related to specific consumer–brand interactions” (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014, p.154). This definition proposes that consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept made up of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). In the present study, we define the cognitive dimension of CBE as the consumer's level of thought processing related to the eco-friendly restaurant as a result of interactions with the restaurant's Instagram account; the affective dimension

of CBE as the consumer's degree of positive feelings towards the eco-friendly restaurant elicited by the interactions with the restaurant's Instagram account; and the behavioural dimension of CBE as the consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent on interactions with the eco-friendly restaurant's Instagram account.

#### *The perceived originality of firm-generated content on Instagram*

FGC is content published online by entities to advertise their products/services and to increase CBE (Liang *et al.*, 2020). As previous analyses have shown, CBE can take place in non-transactional situations, and SNSs are excellent forums for enhancing customer-brand relations (So *et al.*, 2021). Hospitality firms must adopt the latest technological applications to satisfy their customers and differentiate their products from competitors (Law *et al.*, 2022). Acknowledging that social media facilitate customer-brand interactions suggests that a closer analysis should be made of FGC characteristics' role in CBE. This study focuses on perceived originality because it strongly attracts attention to visual content. Originality is one of the most important features of Instagram (Casaló *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Tao, 2021).

Perceived originality has been described as the extent to which SNS posts are regarded by readers as unusual, innovative and sophisticated (Casaló *et al.*, 2020). In contrast to Mohsen *et al.* (2018), who posited that novelty and originality have no significant relationship with customer engagement, recent studies have confirmed that original content can generate closer ties between consumers and brands (Hamzah *et al.*, 2021). When followers perceive that content is original, this increases their cognitive, affective (San *et al.*, 2020) and behavioural engagement (Dolan *et al.*, 2019). In line with uses and gratification theory (Swanson, 1987), we argue that customers follow a restaurant's Instagram account to fulfil their entertainment gratifications. Perceptions of originality may increase the perceived entertainment of a post which, in turn, might engage brand followers. It is argued, therefore, that original content enhances CBE as it surprises, generates positive emotions and thoughts and increases the time that followers spend on the brand's Instagram account. Therefore, we posit that:

- H1. The perceived originality of firm-generated content has a positive effect on cognitive (H1a), affective (H1b) and behavioural (H1c) customer brand engagement with the brand's Instagram account.

#### *Customer brand engagement, brand advocacy and behavioural intentions*

Brand advocacy has been described as being related to how much followers of brands positively recommend them to other consumers, their level of support for the brands and their tendency to avoid alternatives (Xie *et al.*, 2019). In the present study, customer advocacy is understood as recommendations given by the restaurant's account followers to others. Previous studies have argued that there is a correlation between CBE and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviours (Kanje *et al.*, 2020; Khamwon and Nantasuk, 2020). Research has identified customer engagement as a key success factor for firms, as engaged customers can become advocates (So *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, consumers who are content to be brand advocates are very engaged with the brand. Previous studies that have explored the relationship between CBE with eWOM have returned inconclusive results. Some of these studies adopted a unidimensional conceptualisation of CBE (Khamwon and Nantasuk, 2020), and others used multidimensional conceptualisations (Kanje *et al.*, 2020).

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First, drawing on the organisational behaviour literature, some scholars have suggested that a relationship exists between cognitive CBE and behaviours. Vivek *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that cognitive engagement impacts on consumers' attitudes towards brands and on their later behaviours. This is the basis for the proposal that cognitive CBE underlies customer advocacy behaviours on social media sites. However, some research has posited that the relationship between cognitive CBE and eWOM behaviours cannot be proven (Kanje *et al.*, 2020). Second, regarding the affective dimension of CBE, previous tourism sector literature has suggested that positive word-of-mouth (WOM) causes emotional responses to brands (Bilro *et al.*, 2019), and that consumers who develop emotional connections to a brand have a high likelihood of later advocating the brand (Sashi, 2012).

In the context of restaurant-focused Instagram followers, it is proposed that highly engaged consumers will become brand advocates. Thus, our research suggests that CBE has a positive impact on brand advocacy in the restaurant sector. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

*H2.* Cognitive (*H2a*), affective (*H2b*) and behavioural customer brand engagement (*H2c*) with the brand's Instagram account has a positive effect on brand advocacy.

Social media, because of their capacity to generate customer engagement, play a critical role in customers' restaurant selections (Alnsour and Al Faour, 2020). Kumar and Kaushik (2020) demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between a visitor's engagement and loyalty, that is, visit intentions.

Following Hollebeek *et al.* (2014), we posit that CBE can operate on three levels, cognitive, affective and behavioural. Previous tourism-based studies have shown that the cognitive (Jiménez-Barreto *et al.*, 2020) and affective dimensions (Lee *et al.*, 2012) have positive predictive capacity on behavioural intentions to visit. Therefore, it is proposed that the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of CBE play an antecedent role in followers' behavioural intentions to visit restaurants. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3.* Cognitive (*H3a*), affective (*H3b*) and behavioural (*H3c*) customer brand engagement with a restaurant's official Instagram account have a positive influence on consumers' behavioural intentions to make a visit to the establishment.

Brand advocacy is acknowledged to be a useful vehicle for product and service promotion. Recent research into brand advocacy has examined the effect of advocacy on purchase intentions (Putri and Agus, 2019), visit intentions (Huifeng and Ha, 2021) and behavioural intentions (Morwitz *et al.*, 2007). In line with Cachero-Martinez and Vázquez-Casielles (2021), this research posits that attitudinal loyalty (brand advocacy) positively affects behavioural loyalty ((re)visit intentions). Thus, we expect that brand advocates will have stronger intentions to visit the restaurant:

*H4.* Brand advocacy has a positive effect on behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant.

Brand advocacy strongly mediates the relationships between the CBE dimensions and consumers' behavioural intentions. Advocating a brand, in the online context, should be a logical next step for customers who have a strong relationship with the brand (Kumar and Kaushik, 2020). In this study, we consider brand advocacy as the attitudinal loyalty (Cachero-Martinez and Vázquez-Casielles, 2021) that reflects customer trust (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Both loyalty and trust have been shown to be mediating variables

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between brand antecedents, such as past visits and corporate social responsibility reputation, and behavioural intentions (Jiménez-Barreto, 2020). In particular, previous research has suggested that brand advocacy is a mediating variable between frontline employees' brand identification and customer satisfaction (Schepers and Nijssen, 2018), between brand equity and a firm's sustainable performance (Wang and Jiang, 2019) and between perceived corporate social responsibility and pro-environmental behaviours (Afsar and Umrani, 2020). However, little attention has been paid to whether brand advocates have positive behavioural intentions towards the brand they advocate. We posit that brand advocacy is a mediating variable in the relationship between CBE and behavioural intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H5.* Brand advocacy mediates the positive relationship between cognitive (*H5a*), affective (*H5b*) and behavioural (*H5c*) customer brand engagement with a restaurant's Instagram account and behavioural intentions to visit the establishment.

#### *Moderating effect of past visits*

All enterprises must pay close attention to consumers' past experiences (previous visits), and this holds especially in the hospitality sector (Siu *et al.*, 2022). Several studies have shown that having visited a destination is a necessary condition for the generation of brand love (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016). One consequence of brand love is brand advocacy (Khamwon and Pongsuraton, 2020). Studies have shown that customer brand advocacy changes over time because of customer–brand relationships. While no empirical tests have been made of whether past visits moderate CBE dimensions–brand advocacy relationships, there is some evidence (Choi *et al.*, 2021) that they do so strongly, given that relationship length is positively related to satisfaction and WOM. This being the case, and mindful of the importance of the length of the relationship, we expect that past visits will strengthen the effects of CBE on brand advocacy. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

- H6.* When a consumer has visited the restaurant in the past (former customer), the positive influence of cognitive (*H6a*), affective (*H6b*) and behavioural (*H6c*) customer brand engagement with the establishment's Instagram account on brand advocacy will be stronger.

Previous studies have shown that, on their first visits to destinations, tourists actively consult all available sources of information (Kruger *et al.*, 2010). Jiménez-Barreto *et al.* (2020) confirmed that consumers without previous experience of a destination were more likely to form their behavioural intentions based on the advice of others who had made visits, than were consumers who had, in fact, previously been to the destination. In consequence, it is reasonable to suggest that CBE evoked by FGC will be particularly important in persuading potential clients (i.e. clients who had not made previous visits) to make their first visit to the restaurant.

On the other hand, the effect of brand advocacy on visit intentions may be more important for clients who have already visited the restaurant (i.e. clients who had made previous visits), as brand advocacy is based on both consumer–brand interactions on Instagram and interactions when the consumer previously visited the restaurant. Consequently, we expect that the effect of brand advocacy on consumer behavioural intentions will be higher for consumers with no previous experience of the restaurant. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:



- H7. When a consumer has made no previous visits to the restaurant (new customer), the positive effects of cognitive (*H7a*), affective (*H7b*) and behavioural (*H7c*) customer brand engagement with the Instagram account on behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant will be stronger.
- H8. When a consumer has made previous visits to the restaurant (former customer), the positive effect of brand advocacy on behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant will be stronger.

## Methodology

### *Sampling method and data gathering*

The empirical analysis undertaken in the present study looked at eco-friendly restaurants and females. As [Rodríguez-López et al. \(2020\)](#) indicated, eco-friendly restaurants merit investigation because of their continuous growth and their increasing use of Instagram as a communication channel. As male–female differences influence food choices ([Shin and Mattila, 2019](#)), we put the focus on females. Data were gathered from the Instagram account of a widely recognised Madrid-based eco-friendly restaurant [1]. The establishment was picked for the present study:

- because of its substantial, and growing, body of Instagram followers (140,000, June 2022);
- because of its proactivity on Instagram, where it targets women with posts containing advice about healthy food options;
- because the restaurant manager collaborated by uploading the survey on Instagram so that measurements could be made of the research variables using actual clients; and
- because TripAdvisor rates it among the best 5% Madrid-based dining establishments (TripAdvisor, 2022).

While data gathered based on a single case has limitations in terms of generalisation of results, this approach allowed us to provide a very detailed analysis ([Sorensen et al., 2020](#)). Previous SNS/eating establishment-focused research has examined single cases. [Opazo \(2012\)](#) analysed drivers for innovation in haute cuisine using the el Bulli restaurant, and [Sorensen et al. \(2020\)](#) measured experience value creation in a themed attraction restaurant. We used online surveys ([Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006](#)). To allow its followers to access the survey, the establishment posted it on its official Instagram brand account. As is the case with other similarly themed establishments, the restaurant's followers, in general, are young females. Women are more likely than men to lead healthier lifestyles and focus more on healthy food ([Azzurra et al., 2019](#)).

After deleting incomplete cases, the valid sample was made up by 491 responses. Some 68.22% of the participants had visited the restaurant at least once ( $n = 333$ ), and 158 had not visited the restaurant. Nearly half (46.6%) of the sample ( $n = 229$ ) were below 25 years, followed by those between 25 and 34 ( $n = 210$ , 42.8%); the other respondents were above 34 ( $n = 52$ , 10.6%). Regarding their use of Instagram, 88.2% of the respondents ( $n = 433$ ) had at least 2 years of experience of the platform.

### *Measures*

The concepts were measured using scales taken from the existing literature. [Moldovan et al.'s \(2011\)](#) scale was used to measure perceptions of the originality of the FGC;

Hollebeek *et al.*'s (2014) scale was used to assess CBE; Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) scale was used to measure brand advocacy; and Zabkar *et al.*'s (2010) scale was used to measure visit intentions, all adapted to the restaurant services context (Table 1). The scales used seven-point Likert-type response formats, from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Finally, we measured past experiences following Karjaluoto *et al.* (2016) and Jiménez-Barreto *et al.* (2020), using the question:

Q1. "How many times have you visited this restaurant for lunch/dinner or drinks in the last year?" (with an appropriate scale - "1 never" to "more than 8 times").

Before the data were collected, to ensure the participants would understand the descriptions of the items, a pilot test was undertaken with women followers of the restaurant's Instagram account ( $n = 20$ ; aged from 25 and 35 years; 10 had visited the restaurant in the previous year at least once, and the other 10 had never visited the restaurant). These subjects then completed (online) a survey which allowed them to provide advice as to whether any items had been omitted, were of no value or were difficult to comprehend. Based on their advice, some small edits to the survey were undertaken. The empirical model was estimated using structural equation modelling and multigroup analyses, with AMOS 26.0.

Items	Mean	SD
<i>Perceived originality FGC</i> (Moldovan <i>et al.</i> , 2011)		
Publications on X's Instagram account are innovative	5.02	1.33
Publications on X's Instagram account are sophisticated	5.42	1.16
Publications on X's Instagram account are creative	5.86	1.10
<i>Cognitive brand engagement</i> (Hollebeek <i>et al.</i> , 2014)		
Using X's Instagram account gets me to think about X	6.11	1.07
I think about X a lot when I'm using X's Instagram account	6.16	0.97
<i>Affective brand engagement</i> (Hollebeek <i>et al.</i> , 2014)		
I feel very positive when I use X's Instagram account	5.34	1.15
Using X's Instagram account makes me happy	5.07	1.19
I'm proud to use X's Instagram account	5.43	1.16
<i>Behavioural brand engagement</i> (Hollebeek <i>et al.</i> , 2014)		
I spend a lot of time using X's Instagram account, compared to other restaurant Instagram accounts	4.84	1.35
Whenever I'm using restaurant Instagram accounts, I usually use X's Instagram account	5.07	1.51
X's Instagram account is one of the brands I usually use when I use restaurant Instagram accounts	4.11	1.62
<i>Brand advocacy</i> (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Kemp <i>et al.</i> , 2012)		
I have recommended X to lots of people	5.40	1.59
I 'talk up' X to my friends	5.81	1.31
I spread the good-word about X	5.29	1.58
<i>Re/visit intentions</i> (Zabkar <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Huang and Hsu, 2009)		
If had to decide I would choose X (again)	5.99	1.24
I would (more frequently) visit X	5.60	1.24
X would be my first restaurant choice over other restaurants	5.55	1.33

**Table 1.**  
Scales

**Note:** X = Name of eco-friendly restaurant [2]



## Results

The research model evaluation was carried out in three phases. First, we tested the reliability and validity of the measurement model; second, we evaluated the structural model for the total sample; and third, we applied a multigroup analysis. Based on previous literature, we argue that the effects of the CBE dimensions on brand advocacy and behavioural intentions differ between consumer segments as a function of past visits. Thus, the model that is proposed in the present study was estimated for two groups of consumers, a group who had previously visited the restaurant and a group who had not visited the restaurant.

### Measurement model

The psychometric properties of the measurement instrument were examined before hypotheses testing. So to do, a confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken with the multi-item constructs in the proposed framework (using AMOS 26.0). The results for overall goodness of fit were satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 306.438$ ;  $df = 103$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.975$ ; CFI = 0.963; NFI = 0.945; TLI = 0.951; and RMSEA = 0.063), as were the results for reliability and validity (Table 2). The Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability, used to assess reliability, were all above the recommended 0.70 threshold (Hair *et al.*, 1998). The average variance extracted results were all above, or equal to, 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and all items had adequate convergent validity, as all the parameters were statistically significant.

Discriminant validity was verified for both samples using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. In Table 3, it can be seen that the square roots of the average variances extracted for all constructs are higher than the inter-construct correlations.

Finally, we examined the measurement invariance between the two groups. In line with Putnick and Bornstein (2016), we tested invariance using confirmatory factor analysis. First, we confirmed the configural invariance by evaluating the model's fit for the two customer groups simultaneously, imposing no restrictions (Table 4). These results showed that the groups of customers had the same factor structure as the constructs under study. Second, applying the restriction of equality of factor loadings to the two samples, we compared the goodness of fit of this restricted model with the goodness of fit of the unrestricted model (Table 4). Thus, the metric invariance criterion was fulfilled, that is, the differences identified among the causal relationship models related to the relationships, not to the measurements made of the constructs.

### Causal relationship model

The model (Figure 1) was estimated using structural equations modelling; no moderating effects were introduced. The goodness of fit values were satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 397.231$ ;  $df = 108$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 3.678$ ; CFI = 0.947; NFI = 0.929; IFI = 0.947; TLI = 0.933; and RMSEA = 0.074). The  $R^2$  values were estimated to assess the explicative and predictive ability of the model over the whole sample. Specifically, the variance explained for cognitive engagement is  $R^2 = 0.48$ ; for affective engagement, it is  $R^2 = 0.46$ ; for behavioural engagement, it is  $R^2 = 0.40$ ; for brand advocacy, it is  $R^2 = 0.30$ ; and for visit intentions, it is  $R^2 = 0.66$ .

The results obtained in the evaluation of the model with the whole sample (Table 5) showed that the perceived originality of FGC exercises a positive, direct influence on the CBE dimensions, cognitive (*H1a* supported:  $\beta = 0.69$  and  $p < 0.001$ ), affective (*H1b* supported:  $\beta = 0.68$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) and behavioural (*H1c* supported:  $\beta = 0.62$  and  $p < 0.001$ ), and all dimensions exercised a positive influence on brand advocacy (*H2a* supported:  $\beta = 0.13$  and  $p < 0.05$ ; *H2b* supported:  $\beta = 0.15$  and  $p < 0.001$ ; and *H2c* supported:  $\beta = 0.39$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) and on behavioural intentions (*H3a* supported:  $\beta = 0.33$  and  $p < 0.001$ ; *H3b*

Variables	L <sub>i</sub>	E <sub>i</sub>	Reliability		Validity	
			Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Convergent validity
<i>Perceived originality FGC</i>				0.82	0.61	
PO1	0.75	0.44				<i>t</i> = 17.67***
PO2	0.70	0.52				<i>t</i> = 16.28***
PO3	0.89	0.21				–
<i>CBE</i>						
<i>Cognitive CBE</i>				0.67	0.73	
CCE1	0.77	0.41				–
CCE2	0.93	0.13				<i>t</i> = 17.05***
<i>Affective CBE</i>				0.87	0.70	
ACE3	0.91	0.17				
ACE4	0.89	0.21				<i>t</i> = 26.10***
ACE5	0.68	0.53				<i>t</i> = 17.62***
<i>Behavioural CBE</i>				0.79	0.56	
BCE6	0.71	0.50				<i>t</i> = 14.55***
BCE7	0.75	0.44				<i>t</i> = 15.21***
BCE8	0.79	0.38				
<i>Brand advocacy</i>				0.94	0.69	
BA1	0.95	0.10				
BA2	0.87	0.25				<i>t</i> = 31.31***
BA3	0.93	0.14				<i>t</i> = 37.92***
<i>Re/Visit Intentions</i>				0.84	0.80	
VI1	0.81	0.35				
VI2	0.78	0.40				<i>t</i> = 16.72***
VI3	0.81	0.34				<i>t</i> = 17.62***

**Table 2.**  
Analysis of  
reliability and  
validity of  
measurement scales  
for the total sample

**Notes:** Significance level: \*\*\**p* < 0.001. L<sub>i</sub>: Standardised loading; E<sub>i</sub> = (1 – R<sup>2</sup>): error variance;

$$CR = \frac{(\sum L_i)}{(\sum L_i)^2 + \sum var(E_i)}; AVE = \frac{\sum L_i^2}{\sum L_i + \sum var(E_i)}$$

supported:  $\beta = 0.15$  and  $p < 0.001$ ; and *H3c* supported:  $\beta = 0.18$  and  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, the findings showed that brand advocacy exercises a direct, positive effect on behavioural intentions (*H4* supported:  $\beta = 0.40$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) and an indirect, positive effect between CBE and behavioural intentions (*H5a* not supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.05 and  $p > 0.05$ ; *H5b* supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.06 and  $p < 0.05$ ; and *H5c* supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.16 and  $p < 0.001$ ).

Next, we examined the moderating effects and undertook a multigroup structural analysis for both customer groups. We compared the outcome of both models – the first, unrestricted model ( $\chi^2 = 570.347$ ; *df* = 216;  $\chi^2/df = 2.640$ ;  $\Delta\chi^2(g.l) = 7.768$  (11); CFI = 0.935; NFI = 0.901; TLI = 0.916; and RMSEA = 0.058) and a second model ( $\chi^2 = 752.665$ ; *df* = 254;  $\chi^2/df = 2.963$ ;  $\Delta\chi^2(g.l) = 182.318$  (38); CFI = 0.909; NFI = 0.869; TLI = 0.902; and RMSEA = 0.063), applying the restriction of equality criterion for the structural parameters for the two segments (restricted model). The goodness of fit results showed that the model was significantly poorer when restrictions of equality were applied to the structural relationships. This leads to the conclusion that some restrictions are unsustainable.

Females' customer engagement

	Have visited the restaurant before	PO	CCE	ACE	BCE	BA	VI
<i>PO</i>	Yes	<i>0.79</i>	0.66***	0.59***	0.56***	0.52***	0.61***
	No	<i>0.75</i>	0.56***	0.60***	0.52***	0.36***	0.62***
<i>CCE</i>	Yes		<i>0.87</i>	0.64***	0.50***	0.50***	0.70***
	No		<i>0.82</i>	0.57***	0.31**	0.30**	0.58***
<i>ACE</i>	Yes			<i>0.85</i>	0.68***	0.51***	0.63***
	No			<i>0.80</i>	0.44***	0.37***	0.57***
<i>BCE</i>	Yes				<i>0.73</i>	0.53***	0.61***
	No				<i>0.79</i>	0.52***	0.51***
<i>BA</i>	Yes					<i>0.90</i>	0.80***
	No					<i>0.91</i>	0.44***
<i>VI</i>	Yes						<i>0.82</i>
	No						<i>0.80</i>

**Table 3.** Analysis of discriminant validity for both pairs of samples (followers with vs without previous brand experience) according to Fornell–Larcker criterion

**Notes:** In the diagonal and in bold are the square root of average variance extracted. Above the diagonal are the correlation between constructs; Significance level: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Fit indices	Configural invariance ( $M_1$ )	Metric invariance ( $M_2$ )
$\chi^2$	465.736	475.170
Degree of freedom (df)	206	217
$P$	< 0.001	< 0.001
CFI	0.952	0.953
TLI	0.937	0.941
NFI	0.919	0.917
RMSEA	0.051	0.049
$\chi^2$ difference test	$\Delta df = 11; \Delta \chi^2 = 9.434; \text{ and } p = 0.582 > 0.05$	

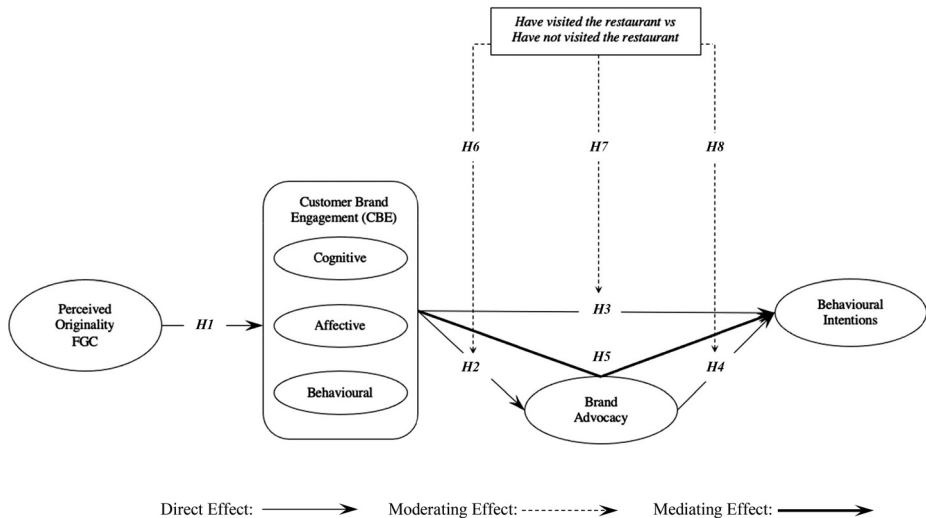
**Table 4.** Measurement invariance test

**Notes:**  $M_1$  assumes the same pattern of fixed and free factor loadings across groups;  $M_2$  assumes that factor loadings are invariant across groups

The results of the multigroup analysis (Table 6) showed that most of the moderating hypotheses proposed in this study are supported, except  $H6c$ ,  $H7a$  and  $H7c$ .

Specifically, for the group of Instagram followers who had visited the restaurant, the three dimensions of CBE, cognitive ( $\beta = 0.36$  and  $p < 0.05$ ), affective ( $\beta = 0.21$  and  $p < 0.05$ ) and behavioural ( $\beta = 0.32$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) had a significant, positive effect on brand advocacy. However, in the group who had not visited the restaurant, only behavioural engagement with the brand on Instagram had a significant, positive effect on brand advocacy; this effect being significantly higher than in the group who had visited the restaurant ( $\beta = 0.62$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) ( $H6a$  and  $H6b$  supported and  $H6c$  not supported).

In the group who had visited the restaurant, behavioural intentions to visit were positively influenced by two of the three engagement dimensions, particularly by cognitive and behavioural engagement (cognitive CBE:  $\beta = 0.34$  and  $p < 0.001$ ; affective CBE:  $\beta = 0.08$  and  $p > 0.10$ ; and behavioural CBE:  $\beta = 0.08$  and  $p < 0.01$ ). In the group who had not visited the restaurant, the engagement generated by the brand on Instagram, in its three



**Figure 1.**  
Research model

dimensions, was a determining factor for making their first visit to the restaurant (cognitive CBE:  $\beta = 0.47$  and  $p < 0.001$ ; affective CBE:  $\beta = 0.28$  and  $p < 0.05$ ; and behavioural CBE:  $\beta = 0.21$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). Comparing the groups, significant differences were observed only for the effect of affective CBE on behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant, this being higher for Instagram followers who had not visited the restaurant ( $H7b$  supported;  $H7a$  and  $H7c$  not supported). In the group who had previously visited the restaurant, brand advocacy was particularly important for behavioural intentions to visit the restaurant ( $\beta = 0.38$  and  $p < 0.001$ ), but in the group who had not visited the restaurant, higher brand advocacy did not translate into greater intention to go there ( $\beta = 0.07$  and  $p > 0.10$ ) ( $H8$  supported). In addition, the findings showed that brand advocacy exercises an indirect, positive effect between CBE and behavioural intentions only in the group who had visited the restaurant ( $H5a$  supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.14 and  $p > 0.05$ ;  $H5b$  supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.08 and  $p < 0.05$ ; and  $H5c$  supported:  $\beta$  indirect effect = 0.12 and  $p < 0.001$ ).

Finally, as to the percentage of variance explained of the endogenous constructs for both customer segments, we observed higher values in the group who had visited the restaurant. Specifically, the variance explained of cognitive engagement is  $R^2 = 0.51$  in the group who had visited the restaurant and  $R^2 = 0.37$  in the group who had not visited the restaurant. For affective engagement, it is  $R^2 = 0.48$  in the group who had visited the restaurant and  $R^2 = 0.42$  in the group who had not visited the restaurant; for behavioural engagement, it is  $R^2 = 0.42$  in the group who had visited the restaurant and  $R^2 = 0.30$  in the group who had not visited the restaurant; for brand advocacy, it is  $R^2 = 0.36$  in the group who had visited the restaurant and  $R^2 = 0.30$  in the group who had not visited the restaurant; and for visit intentions, it is  $R^2 = 0.76$  for the group who had visited the restaurant and  $R^2 = 0.51$  for the group who had not visited the restaurant.

## Discussion and conclusions

### General conclusion

This study analyses long-term consumer–brand relationships by exploring the role of followers' brand engagement and positive behavioural intention formation through content posted by eco-friendly restaurants in Instagram.

Model relationships	Hypothesis	Standardised coefficient	Confidence interval (0.95)		<i>p</i> -value
			Lower bound	Upper bound	
<i>Direct effects</i>					
Originality FGC → Cognitive CBE	<i>H1a</i>	0.69	0.583	0.785	0.000
Originality FGC → Affective CBE	<i>H1b</i>	0.68	0.583	0.758	0.000
Originality FGC → Behavioural CBE	<i>H1c</i>	0.62	0.522	0.709	0.000
Cognitive CBE → Brand advocacy	<i>H2a</i>	0.13	-0.018	0.275	0.088
Affective CBE → Brand advocacy	<i>H2b</i>	0.15	0.015	0.283	0.028
Behavioural CBE → Brand advocacy	<i>H2c</i>	0.39	0.258	0.522	0.000
Cognitive CBE → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H3a</i>	0.33	0.207	0.447	0.001
Affective CBE → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H3b</i>	0.15	0.030	0.279	0.016
Behavioural CBE → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H3c</i>	0.18	0.051	0.299	0.006
Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H4</i>	0.40	0.263	0.526	0.000
<i>Indirect effects</i>					
Cognitive CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H5a</i>	0.05	-0.004	0.114	0.073
Affective CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H5b</i>	0.06	0.008	0.127	0.021
Behavioural CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	<i>H5c</i>	0.16	0.094	0.238	0.000

**Notes:** FGC: firm-generated content; CBE: customer brand engagement. Bootstrap sample = 5,000 with replacement

**Table 5.**  
Estimation of the relationship model

Females'  
customer  
engagement

**Table 6.**  
Results of  
multigroup analysis

Model relationships	Past visit (non-standard coefficients)		Confidence interval (0.95)		No past visit (non-standard coefficients)		Confidence interval (0.95)		<i>p</i> -value
	Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound	
<i>Direct effects</i>									
<i>Cognitive CBE → Brand advocacy</i>	<i>0.355</i>	<i>0.637</i>	<i>0.033</i>	<i>0.637</i>	<i>0.196</i>	<i>0.600</i>	<i>-0.232</i>	<i>0.600</i>	<i>0.367</i>
<i>Affective CBE → Brand advocacy</i>	<i>0.207</i>	<i>0.403</i>	<i>0.030</i>	<i>0.403</i>	<i>0.237</i>	<i>0.639</i>	<i>-0.215</i>	<i>0.639</i>	<i>0.248</i>
<i>Behavioural CBE → Brand advocacy</i>	<i>0.324</i>	<i>0.529</i>	<i>0.150</i>	<i>0.529</i>	<i>0.618</i>	<i>0.927</i>	<i>0.331</i>	<i>0.927</i>	<i>0.000</i>
Cognitive CBE → Behavioural Intentions	0.340	0.518	0.188	0.518	0.467	0.795	0.233	0.795	0.000
<i>Affective CBE → Behavioural Intentions</i>	<i>0.079</i>	<i>0.186</i>	<i>-0.018</i>	<i>0.186</i>	<i>0.281</i>	<i>0.645</i>	<i>0.051</i>	<i>0.645</i>	<i>0.015</i>
Behavioural CBE → Behavioural Intentions	0.083	0.185	-0.013	0.185	0.209	0.444	0.011	0.444	0.041
<i>Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions</i>	<i>0.379</i>	<i>0.508</i>	<i>0.272</i>	<i>0.508</i>	<i>0.072</i>	<i>0.204</i>	<i>-0.066</i>	<i>0.204</i>	<i>0.322</i>
<i>Indirect effects</i>									
Cognitive CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	0.135	0.254	0.022	0.254	0.014	0.101	-0.014	0.101	0.308
Affective CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	0.078	0.168	0.013	0.168	0.017	0.106	-0.013	0.106	0.256
Behavioural CBE → Brand advocacy → Behavioural Intentions	0.123	0.261	0.061	0.261	0.045	0.139	-0.037	0.139	0.257

**Notes:** Past Visits = Followers that have been in the restaurant at least once; and No Past Visits = Followers that have not been in the restaurant. Non-standardised parameters used because of the possible existence of differences in the standard deviation of constructs between samples (Iglesias and Vázquez, 2001). *In italics, significant differences between groups.* Critical Ratio for differences between parameters of 1.963 ( $p < 0.05$ ) for *H6c* and 1.964 ( $p < 0.05$ ) for *H7b*



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Our findings confirmed that the perceived originality of FGC is essential for increasing eco-friendly restaurants' followers' engagement with restaurants' accounts. Thus, if the female followers of an eco-friendly restaurant perceive the FGC posted by the restaurant is original, then it might improve their restaurant-related thought processing, their restaurant-related affect and increase the effort and time they spend interacting with the restaurant. The present study echoes recent literature produced in other contexts, suggesting that original FGC on Instagram creates closer brand–follower relationships (Hamzah *et al.*, 2021), which might help to develop CBE.

The results of the present study also show that customer engagement with tourism service brands is determinant in the generation of visit intentions (Coetzee and Pourfakhimi, 2019; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020) and brand advocacy (Coetzee and Pourfakhimi, 2019; Khamwon and Nantasuk, 2020; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020). Brand advocacy mediates the influence of behavioural engagement on visiting intentions. This result supports previous research into the roles of brand advocacy and positive eWOM as mediators of the relationship between consumers' perceptions of brands and their behavioural intentions (Afsar and Umrani, 2020).

Our findings also emphasised how the positive effects of cognitive, affective and behavioural engagement with the restaurant's Instagram account on brand advocacy and visit intentions are influenced by past visits. When restaurant followers are exposed to Instagram content (stimuli) posted by an eco-friendly restaurant and they have already visited the restaurant, the three types of engagement with the restaurant's account (cognitive, affective and behavioural), elicited by FGC, trigger brand advocacy (response) which, in turn, has a direct effect on followers' intentions to revisit the restaurant. The effect of brand advocacy on future behavioural intentions shows that brand advocacy can reinforce Instagram followers' preferences (Tien *et al.*, 2019), re-purchase intentions (Putri and Agus, 2019) and visit intentions (Huifeng and Ha, 2021).

However, for customers who had not visited the restaurant, only if they invest more time viewing the restaurant's Instagram account than viewing other restaurants' accounts (behavioural engagement) will they be willing to advocate the restaurant. For this customer segment, merely to think about the restaurant, or to feel positive emotions when they look at the restaurant's account, is not enough to trigger an intention to make positive recommendations; they need a high level of interaction with the restaurant's account (behavioural engagement) before they will be willing to recommend the restaurant. Both new and former customers will (re)visit the restaurant if they feel engaged with the content posted by the restaurant in Instagram.

The effect of positive feelings elicited when followers interact with the restaurant's account (affective CBE) on visit intentions is consistent with recent research that demonstrated that a positive SNS experience can act as a significant predictor of consumers' intentions to visit a brand's physical store (Boley *et al.*, 2018). The impact of affective CBE on future intentions to visit the restaurant is higher for new customers (customers who has not previously visited) than for previous customers (customers who had visited). One possible explanation for this result is that followers with previous experience trust more in the feelings elicited by their personal experience of the restaurant than by the feelings elicited by viewing the restaurant's account.

The moderating role of past visits on the proposed model sheds light on the association between CBE and eWOM behaviours and complements previous studies which returned inconclusive results on this relationship. On the one hand, Kanje *et al.* (2020) posited that the cognitive dimension does not drive brand advocacy, and Bilro *et al.* (2019) showed that brand advocacy is not truly associated with the engagement dimensions. On the other hand,

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in line with [Khamwon and Nantasuk \(2020\)](#) and [Kumar and Kaushik \(2020\)](#), our findings suggest that customers who are engaged with a restaurant tend to be open to brand advocacy.

Another interesting finding is that the role of behavioural CBE is very important in building advocacy, but that the role of cognitive CBE is greater in building behavioural intentions. These results indicate that CBE with a restaurant's Instagram account strengthens followers' feelings of loyalty towards, and bonds with, the restaurant. In addition, the importance of brand advocacy is highlighted, as it can indirectly reinforce the effects of CBE on followers' behavioural intentions.

#### *Theoretical implications*

The results obtained in the present study increase the knowledge of the theoretical mechanisms that underlie followers' engagement with eco-friendly restaurant's social media accounts. This research demonstrated that eco-friendly restaurants must persuade their followers that the material they publish on Instagram is original; this may evoke other organismic reactions in the followers (CBE). In other words, in line with [Khoi and Le \(2022\)](#), the results stress that companies can enhance CBE by exceeding their consumers' expectations, which can be achieved by creating the perception in their minds that their FGC is original. Uses and gratifications theory proposes that individuals use media to meet their needs and goals. Previous research has shown that the entertainment gratification evoked by creative/innovative FGC on Instagram positively influences (the dimensions of) CBE with establishments' accounts; and the relationships between these factors have been confirmed by uses and gratifications theory. Thus, potential clients are likely to think more about the restaurant, will have positive feelings towards it and will spend time on its Instagram account when their individual entertainment gratifications are met by creative FGC. The present study, therefore, raises significant theoretical implications for eco-friendly restaurants, as it provides a deeper understanding of how to design marketing campaigns that create the originality that produces consumer engagement.

As important and addressing the call made by [Li and Wei \(2021\)](#), this study showed the validity of the S–O–R framework ([Mehrabian and Russell, 1974](#)) for explaining how eco-friendly restaurants' posts on Instagram (S) influence CBE (O) which, in turn, leads to positive responses (behavioural intentions and brand advocacy). The study contributes to previous research on the S–O–R model by demonstrating that when eco-friendly restaurants post original content on visual-based social media (stimulus), they can persuade their female followers to think about them, feel positive emotions towards them and to intensively engage with their online accounts (organism). This, in turn, triggers followers' intentions to visit the restaurant in the future and to recommend the restaurant to others (response).

To extend the previous knowledge of the S–O–R model, the moderating impact of prior visits to the restaurant was assessed. This is particularly important from the theory-building perspective, as the results of this study showed the importance of past visits in determining the impact of CBE on brand advocacy.

Past visits and experience with restaurants encourage their followers to recommend them to others. Furthermore, the study shows that for consumers with no prior experience of the establishment, affective CBE evoked increased behavioural intentions

#### *Practical implications*

As to practical implications, the results of the study should be of interest to eco-friendly restaurant managers. First, this study can help restaurants to develop marketing strategies targeted towards females on visual-based social networks. Eco-friendly restaurants in Madrid

should encourage their customers' perceptions of the originality and creativity of their FGC; this can drive the three CBE dimensions among their female restaurant followers on Instagram and encourage favourable responses, such as positive consumer–brand interactions.

Instagram, an image-based social media, focuses on visuals and aesthetics, so Madrid-based restaurants might use its editing function to post material to enhance their followers' perceptions of its originality and increase their CBE to differentiate themselves from other restaurants in Madrid. For example, they could share innovative and updated content (e.g. recipes, ways to decorate a table and employees' presentations), applying attractive filters to photos, including humour (e.g. "Say Cheese" when presenting a new cheese-based dish) and sharing the restaurant's usual playlist.

Second, the results showed that past visits strengthen the relationship between CBE and brand advocacy; thus, managers might organise events, for example, by collaborating with eco-friendly producers (e.g. Komvida Konbucha) and artisanal bakeries (e.g. Madre Amiga) and invite their female followers to visit their restaurants to enjoy positive experiences. These types of action can allow the restaurant to take advantage of the opportunities that Instagram provides to foster consumer advocacy.

Finally, our findings have interesting societal implications, as improving the communication capacities of eco-friendly restaurants can contribute to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In this way, restaurants in Madrid could foster engagement with sustainability movements and improve the quality of their customers' lives by providing eco-friendly foods.

#### *Limitations and future research lines*

This paper has limitations that future research might address. First, the study used data taken from a single restaurant Instagram account. Therefore, to generalise the findings, future research might investigate other kinds of restaurants (e.g. fast-food restaurants or thematic restaurants). Second, our sample is based on young, female customers. Future insights might be provided by using female and male samples to analyse the effects of gender on CBE in this context. Third, although this research focuses on the originality of FGC as an antecedent of CBE, future research should consider other FGC characteristics and the moderating role of the source (FGC vs UGC).

#### **Notes**

1. The name of the restaurant is not revealed at this stage to maintain anonymity.
2. Not revealed at this stage to maintain anonymity.

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**Further reading**

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