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International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management

Store brand evaluative process in an international context

Introduction

Consumer attitude towards store brands (SB) has changed remarkably in recent years (Shukla *et al*., 2013). Consumers are now delighted to find SBs in stores in which they shop (Diallo *et al*., 2013). At the same time, an ever-increasing number of store brands are currently being launched in almost every consumer-packaged-goods category (Ter Braak *et al*., 2014) because of the strong competitive pressure that retailers face (Liu and Wang, 2008). As a result, SBs have reached significant levels of market penetration across Europe and North America (Manzur *et al*., 2011; Sellers-Rubio and Nicolau-Gonzálbez, 2015). According to PLMA (Private Label Manufacturer Association, 2015), the market penetration of SBs exceeds 50% in Switzerland and Spain and reaches 45% in the UK, 44% in Germany, 35% in France and 21% in Italy. In the US, the SB market share amounts to 21%.

Although SBs have increasingly been researched by marketing scholars and are the focus of retail managers' interest (Hyman *et al.*, 2010; Beneke *et al*., 2015), only partial evidence exists on the SB purchase decision-making process. A consumer's previously developed attitude towards a brand directly influences his or her brand preference, which in turn directly affects purchase intention (Blackwell *et al.,* 2006; Mantel and Kardes, 1999; Thang and Tan, 2003). Given that consumers who develop positive attitudes towards SB are more likely to buy them (Burton *et al*., 1998), understanding the complete process that shoppers follow in order to assess brands is critical for effective SB promotion. Additionally, retailers need to know how specific customer characteristics and product evaluative criteria affect each stage of SB purchase decision-making to design successful marketing strategies. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to analyse the relationships between the three stages of the SB decision-making process (attitude, preference and purchase intention formation) and to identify the factors that influence each phase of shoppers' affective response.

In explaining the success of SBs, most previous research has focused only on identifying the antecedents of consumer attitude towards these brands (e.g., Burton *et al.*, 1998; Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001; Martínez and Montaner, 2008; Gómez and Rubio, 2010). A smaller number of studies have investigated the factors that influence SB purchase intention (Kara *et al*., 2009; Dursun *et al*., 2011; Beneke *et al*., 2013, 2015), and very few have simultaneously analysed the factors that influence both types of consumer response (Jin and Gu Suh, 2005; Caplliure *et al*., 2010; Chaniotakis *et al*., 2010; Diallo *et al*., 2013). No previous study has analysed the factors that influence SB preference, nor has it been empirically demonstrated that SB preference is a mediating variable between SB attitude and SB purchase intention. Therefore, this paper fills a research gap by proposing and testing a theoretical model that identifies the antecedents of SB preference while investigating the relationships between SB attitude, preference and purchase intention formation. Our results show that certain consumer variables that previous researchers have found to influence attitude actually affect preference.

In the field of retail brands, very few multinational studies have previously been conducted (e.g., Erdem *et al.*, 2004; Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2005; Mandhachitara *et al.*, 2007; Anchor and Kourilová, 2009; Nenycz-Thiel and Romaniuk, 2014), and all of these studies use samples from two or three countries. This work is part of a larger project and involves an extensive empirical study that aggregates data from 1,118 shoppers across six Western nations. Therefore, the contribution of this paper is two-fold. First, from a theoretical perspective, this work extends research on the consumer decision-making process by empirically demonstrating that SB preference is a mediating variable between SB attitude and SB purchase intention. Second, from a practical perspective, the multinational sample used in our study offers a higher degree of external validity and greater generalization of the results obtained.

The study begins with the theoretical background and hypothesis section. The main antecedents of SB attitude, preference and purchase intention are systematically examined in a comprehensive literature review, and a conceptual model is proposed. The methodology section describes the data collection strategy. The results section reports the empirical findings that are later analysed in de discussion section. To conclude, the implications of the study are presented to provide useful information to retail managers. The conclusion section also presents the limitations of the study and suggests avenues for further research.

Background and Hypotheses

According to Laroche *et al*. (2001), the most widely accepted paradigm for explaining the aforementioned evaluative process is "Cognition, Affect and Behaviour" (CAB), initially proposed by Howard and Seth (1969). Essentially, consumers assess purchase alternatives following a three-step process (Blackwell *et al*., 2006). The usual chain of effects begins with the formation of an attitude based on the shopper's beliefs regarding product performance relative to key evaluative criteria. Attitude development is followed by the emergence of a preference for one product/brand within the alternative set over the others. Finally, preference leads to an intention to act (i.e., purchase) (Oliver and Linda, 1981).

Figure 1 provides the conceptual model for this study. It identifies the three aforementioned components (attitude, preference and purchase intention) and the relationships between them in the SB purchase context.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Figure 1. Conceptual model: SB consumer decision making.

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One challenge of the literature review has been to identify the focus of previous studies given the frequently imprecise use of concepts such as attitude, proneness, choice and intention (Jin and Gu Suh, 2005). Attitude, or the "learned predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward something" (Fishbein and Azjen, 1975, p. 216), is a predictor of preference (Bass *et al.*, 1972; Weber, 2010). Therefore, a favourable attitude towards a given brand will influence a consumer's preference for that brand (Mantel and Kardes, 1999; Fujii and Gärling, 2003). The term "preference" is often used informally to mean "attitude". However, the concept of "preference" assumes adherence to benefit-cost comparisons (Phillips *et al.*, 2002; Weber, 2010). Drawing from stimulus-organism-response (S–O–R) theory, Thang and Tan (2003) define preference as an emotive response that refers to consumers' hierarchical prioritization of the alternatives available to them, holding constant major product attributes and consumer characteristics. The study of Mantel and Kardes (1999) complements this definition by affirming that preference formation may involve the comparison of brands on specific attributes but also comparisons in terms of overall evaluations. Empirical evidence that customer preference is an antecedent of purchase intention has been provided by Oliver and Linda (1981), Cobb-Walgren *et al.* (1995), Labeaga *et al.*, (2007), Chang and Liu (2009) and Wang (2010). In addition, purchase intention, which represents the subjective probability that consumers will be willing to buy a certain product or service in the future (Wu *et al.*, 2011), has been found to be positively related to actual SB purchases (Burton *et al.*, 1998).

Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize (1) that a positive SB attitude has a positive effect on the preference for store brands and (2) that consumer preference for store brands positively influences SB purchase intention.

Consumer traits that are conventionally used to draw profiles of SB-prone shoppers can be classified into socio-economic, perceptual or psychographic traits (Batra and Sinha, 2000;

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Semeijn *et al.*, 2004; Jin and Gu Suh, 2005). The impact of socio-demographic variables on attitudes towards SB is generally weak, and the evidence is inconclusive (Burton *et al.*, 1998; Baltas, 2003). Prior empirical research suggests that social class (Martos and González, 2009), education (Martínez and Montaner, 2008), age (Omar, 1996) and gender (Guerrero *et al.*, 2000) may have an impact on SB attitude. However, the work of Baltas and Argouslidis (2007) asserts that monthly expenditure, average expenditure by shopping trip, gender, family size and age are not significant predictors of SB purchase intentions. Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Fan *et al.* (2012) shows that age, education level and household income have no predictive effect on SB behavioural intent. Shukla *et al.* (2013) conclude that socio-demographic variables moderate the influence of psychographic traits on SB attitude. Their influence seems to greatly depend on the product category (Dhar and Hoch, 1997; González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2012; Wyma *et al.*, 2012) and the retail environment (Juhl *et al.*, 2006). Hence, our model incorporates socio-demographic characteristics only as control variables.

Our conceptual framework is further developed based on the input of the following variables previously identified as antecedents of SB attitude in the literature: 1) shoppers' perceptual characteristics, 2) psychographic consumer traits and 3) product evaluative criteria.

SB shoppers' perceptual characteristics

Perceptual characteristics define consumers based on how they evaluate brands during the purchase decision process (Sinha and Batra, 1999). Jin and Gu Suh (2005) discussed what may be the widest group of perceptual variables that may impact SB purchase. Drawing on their study, we integrate in our model the factors that previous research has found to have the most significant impact on either SB attitude or behavioural intent: price and value consciousness and risk perception. Additionally, we incorporate two perceptual variables that

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have less frequently been linked to SB attitude: brand familiarity and smart shopper self-perception.

The concept of "*consumer consciousness*" evokes characteristics such as price consciousness and value consciousness, which have been extensively studied in the context of retail brands (Kara *et al.*, 2009). Price consciousness has been defined as "the degree to which the consumer focuses exclusively on paying low prices" (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 1993). Sinha and Batra (1999) identified price consciousness as an attitudinal predisposition and clearly distinguished it from the economic concepts of price sensitivity and price elasticity used in behaviour-oriented studies. As retail brands are traditionally priced below NB, price conscious consumers tend to be SB prone (González Mieres *et al.*, 2006). Value-conscious consumers seek to maximize the value of their purchase or "the quality one gets for the price one pays" (Jin and Gu Suh, 2005). These consumers tend to have a positive attitude towards SB because of the advantageous balance between price and quality represented by SB (Manzur *et al.*, 2011). The vast majority of researchers have reported that price consciousness (e.g., Burton *et al*, 1998; Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001; Martos and González, 2009) and value consciousness (e.g., Burton *et al*, 1998; Garretson *et al.*, 2002; Gómez and Rubio. 2010) are directly and positively related to SB attitude. Notably, a few studies confirm the same relationship between price and value consciousness and purchase intention (Diallo *et al.*, 2013; Jin and Gu Suh, 2005). Given Kara *et al.*'s (2009) study confirming that consumer consciousness has the same impact on brand perceptions as price and value consciousness separately, we expect consumer consciousness to have a positive impact on SB attitude.

Smart shopper self-perception is an ego-related feeling expressed as a sense of accomplishment and pride in shopping *savoir faire* that is generated when shoppers perceive that they have obtained a bargain as a result of their own ability (Schindler, 1989; Garretson *et al.*, 2002). In markets as culturally distant as the US, Taiwan and Chile, smart shopper self-perception has been found to have a positive impact on SB attitude (Garretson *et al.*, 2002; Liu and Wang, 2008; Manzur *et al.*, 2011), probably because smart shoppers perceive that when the buy SB, they are attaining the optimal value as an outcome of their evaluative efforts and, consequently, feel that their self-esteem is rewarded. Thus, we expect to find a positive relationship between smart shopper self-perception and SB attitude.

Brand familiarity refers to the number of both direct and indirect product experiences that the consumer has encountered through marketing activities (e.g., advertising exposure or interaction with the sales force), word of mouth, trial and consumption (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). During the evaluation process, greater familiarity increases the probability that a particular brand will be included in the evoked set, encourages a positive brand attitude, and motivates purchase behaviour (Caplliure *et al.,* 2010; Dursun *et al.*, 2011). The familiarity factor generates greater positive evaluations of NB than of SB (Omar, 1996). NB buyers tend to view NBs as more relevant to their lifestyles than SB consumers do (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2010). Thus, we anticipate that consumers who have greater familiarity with NB will be less SB prone.

In relation to SB evaluation, *perceived risk* can have functional, financial, social and psychological associations (Gómez and Rubio, 2010). Previous studies report that perceived risk is a key antecedent of NB choice (Erdem *et al*., 2004). By contrast, it has a negative impact on SB attitude (Batra and Sinha, 2000; Semeijn *et al.*, 2004; Gómez and Rubio, 2010; Beneke *et al*., 2015) and SB purchase intention (Dursun *et al.*, 2011). Perceived risk has two main components: (1) the perceived negative impact caused by making the wrong choice and (2) the probability that the individual will make the same erroneous choice over time (Kapferer and Laurent, 1986). Therefore, in contrast with previous studies that did not analyse preference formation, the present study accounts for the perception of risk that arises when the

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shopper is confronted with a choice (i.e., when the preference is formed). Thus, perceived risk should have a negative influence on SB preference.

SB shoppers' psychographic variables

The extant literature suggests that consumer values, personalities and lifestyles can also be predictors of purchase behaviour relative to SB (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001). However, there is no general agreement regarding the explanatory power of impulsiveness and exploration. Moreover, no previous studies have investigated the relationship between psychographic characteristics and consumer preference for SB over NB.

Innovation and variety-seeking are traits commonly attributed to consumers who enjoy pursuing new experiences. According to Ailawadi *et al.* (2001), both concepts could form a single construct called "*exploration*" because a high correlation between the variables is expected. Consumers who search for variety in their shopping trips tend to have positive attitudes towards SB (Baltas, 1997; Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001; Martínez and Montaner, 2008). However, studies that attempt to identify innovation as an antecedent of SB attitude (Omar, 1996; Baltas, 1997; Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001; Gómez and Rubio, 2010) are controversial and fail to provide significant results. Additionally, researchers who have analysed the effect of consumer innovation on purchase intention have found the relationship to be positive (Jin and Gu Suh, 2005; Martos and González, 2009). Based on industry reports (Promarca, 2013), manufacturers are leaders in the innovation of fast-moving consumer goods. Consequently, individuals who seek new shopping experiences and who often make purchase decisions when they analyse existing offers at a store (Martínez and Montaner, 2008) will prefer NB over SB.

There is also a lack of general agreement in the academic literature regarding the explanatory power of *impulsiveness* relative to SB attitude. Burton *et al.* (1998) suggested that

SB-prone consumers typically take time to evaluate purchase alternatives. As a result, they are less likely to buy on impulse. However, Ailawadi *et al.* (2001) and Manzur *et al.* (2011) did not find this relationship to be significant. Because retailers often allocate significant and privileged space to their own brands over NB (Fernández and Gómez, 2005), shoppers can buy SB on impulse when they are attracted by retailers' point-of-sale marketing actions (Dursun *et al.*, 2011; Manzur *et al.*, 2011). Thus, we propose that rather than influencing consumer attitudes, the psychographic trait of "impulsiveness" becomes relevant in the last stage of the evaluative process, when the purchase intention is formed.

Product evaluative criteria

Attitude is expressed by evaluating a particular brand on specific attributes with some degree of favour or disfavour (Phillips *et al*., 2002). Specific product attributes that enable consumers to evaluate product quality are key antecedents of brand attitude (Laroche *et al.*, 2001). In this study, we analyse how quality inferences derived from price, brand image, reputation and efficiency impact SB attitude. When consumers lack confidence in their own capacity to select the most appropriate alternative, they typically rely on extrinsic product attributes from which they can infer the quality of a product, such as price, brand name (González Mieres *et al.*, 2006) and packaging features (Monnot *et al*., 2015). Richardson (1997) suggests that consumers may perceive SB as lower-quality options compared with NB because SB typically lack a distinctive brand name, are not supported by advertising, and tend to have simple package designs. By contrast, the overpackaging of NB products may lead shoppers to attribute plain packaging to lower quality as well as to lower product prices (Monnot *et al*., 2015).

Individuals who rely on price to evaluate product quality tend to have unfavourable perceptions of SBs because SBs are traditionally priced below NBs (González Mieres *et al.*,

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2006). In contrast, when customers evaluate SBs based on intrinsic attributes (organoleptic and functional characteristics), the quality of these brands is perceived to be equivalent (if not superior) to that of NB, as supported by the findings from blind tests designed by Davies and Brito (2004) and De Wulf *et al.* (2005). Thus, we expect that quality inferences made from price would have a negative impact on SB attitude, whereas quality inferences made from efficiency would be positively associated with SB attitude.

The sum of associations and evaluations registered in the shopper's mind that lead to perceptions about the brand, or brand image (Keller, 1993), has been found to be directly related to brand attitude (Faircloth *et al*., 2001; Vahie and Paswan, 2006). Extant studies have also established that a positive reputation influences consumers' perceptions of product quality (Calvo-Porral and Lang, 2015). Shoppers are generally less familiar with the brand image and reputation of SBs compared with more heavily advertised NBs. Thus, individuals who make quality inferences from brand image and reputation would tend to be less SB prone.

Table 1 summarizes the impact of the selected input variables (perceptual, psychographic or evaluative criteria) in each stage of the SB purchase process supported by previous literature.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Methodology

A preliminary study was conducted to aid in the development of the survey instruments. Sixteen in-depth interviews were held in urban areas in Chicago (U.S.A.) and Madrid (Spain) with similar characteristics. To select the sample, three stratification variables

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were used: gender, age and education. The fieldwork was conducted in November 2011. Interviews contributed to defining the profile of SB consumers in an international context.

Data for the main study were collected in 2012 from 1,188 consumers responsible for the purchase of fast-moving consumer goods within their respective households using a self-administrated on-line questionnaire. Qualtrics, a private research software company, was contracted to gather the information.

The final international sample included shoppers from Spain (n=202), EEUU (n=201), Germany (n=200), France (n=189), the UK (n=197) and Italy (n=199). Descriptive measures of the sample are included in the annex. There are significant differences among countries for gender, age and work. However, as shown in the results section, these variables do not have a significant impact on the SB evaluation process. Thus, the bias produced by these classification variables does not affect the dependent variables. Spanish- and English-language questionnaires were developed by the research project team and revised by a professional editing service. Once the correct expressions in both languages were established, they were translated into German, Italian and French versions and revised by native speakers in each language.

Shampoo was chosen as the product category because it is purchased on a regular basis and therefore is easily evaluated by consumers. Furthermore, the purchase of personal care products is linked to lifestyle and requires greater consumer engagement in the evaluative process (Alarcón and Alonso, 2013). SBs also enjoy a significant market share in this category, making them a credible purchase alternative to NBs.

The questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first section presented images of two shampoo brands: a well-known NB sold in all the sample countries and a simulated generic SB. Each brand had its own price (lower for the SB). Consumers were asked to indicate their preference for one brand using a nominal scale (0=NB and 1=SB).

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Their attitude towards both brands and their purchase intention were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The second section introduced items related to the perceptual and psychographic variables as well as evaluative criteria. All variables were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale. The items employed were validated in previous research (Baltas, 1997; Burton *et al.*, 1998; Ailawadi *et al.*, 2001; Garretson *et al.*, 2002; Jin and Gu Suh, 2005; González Mieres *et al.*, 2006; Gómez and Rubio, 2010). The third section covered the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Results

All independent variables were measured with a single item, except for exploration and consumer consciousness. Descriptive results for these single indicators are shown in Table 2. The average values were relatively low, generally below the intermediate position of the scale (4). Price and efficiency had the lowest values. By contrast, smart shopping was the only indicator whose mean exceeded 5. Regarding the dependent variables in the models with an interval scale, SB attitude had a higher mean than purchase intention, although the latter had a greater standard deviation.

[Insert Table 2 here]

For exploration (4 items) and consumer consciousness (5 items), a principal component factor analysis was used. The scales for these constructs were validated by Ailawadi *et al*. (2001) and Gómez and Rubio (2010). These factors were measured using the composed item scale based on the literature review. The items can be provided to readers upon request. A two-factor solution accounting for nearly 60% of the explained variance was obtained. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were higher than 0.70 in both cases, confirming

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the reliability of the model. Confirmatory analysis also showed a composite reliability coefficient above 0.7. Convergent validity showed all parameters significant and an AVE higher than 0.5.

A mixed chained regression procedure was conducted to estimate the proposed models with three different dependent variables (attitude, preference and intention).

SB attitude was the dependent variable for the first model. It was influenced by the seven variables identified in the background section: smart shopping, consumer consciousness, NB familiarity and quality-price indicators (price, brand image, reputation and efficiency). A stepwise multiple regression model was used because the dependent variable had an interval scale.

SB preference (nominal scale) was the dependent variable for the second model, with its estimation based on the forward logistic regression method. The independent variables of this model were SB attitude, perceived risk and exploration.

A multiple stepwise regression procedure was again used for the third model to estimate the influence of preference and impulsiveness on SB purchase intention. We pooled the sample because there were no statistical differences among the estimated parameters (for attitude, t=0.12 n.s.; for preference, t=0.20 n.s.). Moreover, the mediation effect of brand preference (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995; Chang and Liu, 2009; Wang, 2010) was calculated following Judd and Kenny (1981) and Sobel's (1982) procedures. The mediation effect in the first case was 0.334 and in the second case was 0.226. Therefore, this effect was statistically significant in both cases.

An overview of the final model is provided in Figure 2.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Figure 2. Final empirical model.

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As expected, demographic variables did not have a significant impact on the SB evaluative process.

Consistent with previous studies, consumer consciousness (β=0.08) and smart shopper self-perception (β=0.09) were positive predictors of *SB attitude*, supporting H3 and H4, respectively. As predicted by H5 and H9, NB familiarity (β= -0.09) and quality inferences made from price (β=-0.26) negatively influenced SB attitude. Efficiency (β=0.09) was also a significant positive antecedent of SB attitude, although its effect was much smaller than that of price. These findings provide support for H12. Contrary to expectations, quality inferences based on brand image (β=0.07) and reputation (β=0.15) had a significant positive effect on SB attitude. A negative effect was anticipated by the respective hypothesis. Hence, H10 and H11 were not supported.

Salient among our findings is that *SB preference* was positively affected by a previously formed attitude (β=1.04) and that *SB preference* (β=0.60) was an antecedent of SB *purchase intention*, supporting H1 and H2, respectively. The results also reveal that perceived risk (β=-0.35) becomes relevant when a preference is taking shape. H6 is therefore accepted, and it may be concluded that consumers with greater risk aversion tend to prefer NBs over SBs. Similarly, the results show that exploration-prone consumers tend to prefer NBs over SBs (β=-0.25), supporting H7. Finally, as predicted by H8, impulsiveness (β= 0.05) was found to positively influence SB purchase intention.

Discussion

The findings confirm that consumers' evaluation of SBs follows a three-step process that begins with the formation of an attitude towards the brand, which directly influences brand preference and subsequently positively affects purchase intention.

Positive attitudes towards an SB have traditionally been associated with customer traits such as smart shopper self-perception, consumer consciousness, brand familiarity, risk perception, exploration and impulsiveness (Ailawadi *et al.,* 2001; Garretson *et al*., 2002). The current study's results are aligned with the prevailing views regarding the positive impact of the first two aforementioned variables on SB attitude. They also support previous studies that claim that NB familiarity has a negative impact on shoppers' attitude towards retail brands. However, according to our findings, consumers' propensity to explore purchase alternatives and their risk perception are antecedents of SB preference rather than SB attitude. Additionally, this study helps to clarify the effect of impulsiveness on SB evaluations as no previous research has found a significant relationship between impulsiveness and SB attitude. The results show that once consumers have undergone the cognitive and affective phases of the purchasing process, they may buy SBs on impulse; therefore, this variable positively influences SB purchase intention rather than SB attitude.

Attitude is expressed by evaluating a particular brand on specific attributes with some degree of favour or disfavour (Phillips *et al*., 2002). In this study, we have analysed how quality inferences made from price, brand image, reputation and efficiency impact SB attitude. Our results show that price is the most important predictor of SB attitude. Consumers who rely on price to infer the quality of a product tend to favour the NB over the SB. Contrary to expectations, quality inferences based on brand image and reputation have a significant positive effect on SB attitude. Shoppers who rely on brand image and reputation to evaluate products exhibit a positive SB attitude, probably because of significant distributor efforts to manage their assortments and improve their brand associations over time. As a result, customers appear to perceive retail brands as an alternative with a good price-quality balance and trust the promise that such brands represent. Finally, quality inferences made from product efficiency have a positive impact on SB attitude. One possible explanation is the significant work undertaken by most large retailers to launch SBs with unique features to compete with the highest-quality NBs (Ter Braak *et al.*, 2014).

Conclusions and implications

The great majority of consumer studies related to SB choice focus on end-user attitudes towards these brands. Only a small number of studies examine shoppers' behavioural responses, and research that investigates the affective and conative components of the decision-making process simultaneously is scarce (Jin and Gu Suh, 2005; Caplliure *et al.*, 2010; Diallo *et al.*, 2013). Our study fills this gap in the literature by proposing a conceptual model that analyses the three phases of the alternative evaluation process: attitude, preference and purchase intention formation. Moreover, most studies refer to consumers from a single country. By contrast, our research uses a multinational sample that offers a higher degree of external validity and greater generalization of the results.

This study's findings expand on prevailing views, specifically regarding consumers' preference for store brands. First, our results reveal that quality inferences based on brand image and reputation have a significant positive effect on store brand attitude. Second, we find that shoppers' propensity to explore in their shopping trips and their risk perceptions are antecedents of store brand preference rather than store brand attitude. Finally, we can conclude that impulsiveness has a significant, although small, positive impact on store brand purchase intention.

Managerial Implications

Knowing how and which consumer psychographic and perceptual characteristics affect each specific stage of the above-mentioned process has important managerial implications as it may help retailers increase the efficiency of their SB marketing strategies.

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Notably, given that smart shoppers are sensitive to SBs, retailers that seek to generate in consumers a positive attitude towards their private label could implement marketing activities that (1) reduce brand comparison efforts and (2) encourage shoppers to believe they are obtaining the best price as a result of their evaluative efforts. Promotions that evoke attributions of responsibility are a good example of the latter. Additionally, because SB-prone shoppers rely on efficiency to infer product quality, direct product comparisons, expert recommendations and opinion-leader testimonials could be effective marketing tools to encourage positive attitudes towards retailers' own brands.

Once consumers have formed a positive attitude towards the SB, the next challenge for a retail marketing manager is to ensure that the retail brand is preferred among all brands included in a shopper's evoked set. Our study is the first to identify consumers' propensity for exploration and their risk perception as antecedents of SB preference. It is in this middle stage of the evaluation process when innovative consumers who enjoy variety seeking tend to prefer NBs. Retail managers should continue to invest in product innovation and explore new ways of improving the overall shopping experience to surprise and delight potential SB shoppers who currently prefer NB.

Regarding risk perception, shoppers assess the loss that they would incur from making the wrong choice. Retailers could minimize this perceived risk by offering product warranties, encouraging product trials and implementing customer-friendly product return processes.

Retailers' efforts to encourage positive associations of their own brands by enhancing reputation and brand image are experiencing positive outcomes. Some retailers are even engaging in social responsibility activities that lead to more favourable evaluations of their brands (Tofighi and Bodur, 2015). As a result of these activities, consumers are beginning to view retailers as corporations that assume economic, legal, ethical, and social responsibilities towards their stakeholders and society. Consequently, consumers also perceive the SB products of such retailers as having a positive image, which exerts a positive influence on SB purchase intention (Calvo-Porral and Lang, 2015).

To conclude, this study helps to clarify the effect of impulsiveness on SB evaluations. Because impulsiveness positively influences SB purchase intention rather than SB attitude, even SB shoppers who typically plan their purchases (Burton *et al.*, 1998) are not completely immune to impulse buying. This finding presents opportunities for retail managers to use packaging design, attractive planograms and point-of-sale promotions and communication to encourage unplanned SB purchases.

Limitations and future research

The inclusion of only one product category (shampoo) is a limitation of this study. Furthermore, as we intended, no specific retailer could be identified by looking at the picture of the shampoo bottle carrying the generic label. Future research could reproduce more realistic shopping conditions by adding products from different categories, omitting simulated generic brands and including real SBs. A new research line could seek to explain how differing cultural or economic market conditions among countries influence SB versus NB evaluation. Finally, because smart shopping is a growing trend that we have studied only tangentially, further research should examine how smart shoppers' feelings and behaviours influence SB penetration.

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Note 1: *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$. Dotted arrows indicate that the sign of the relationship is different than expected.

Note 2: The coefficient of attitude is greater than 1 because of the different scales used for perceived risk and attitude (1 to 7) and for exploration (-1 to 1 from the PCA).

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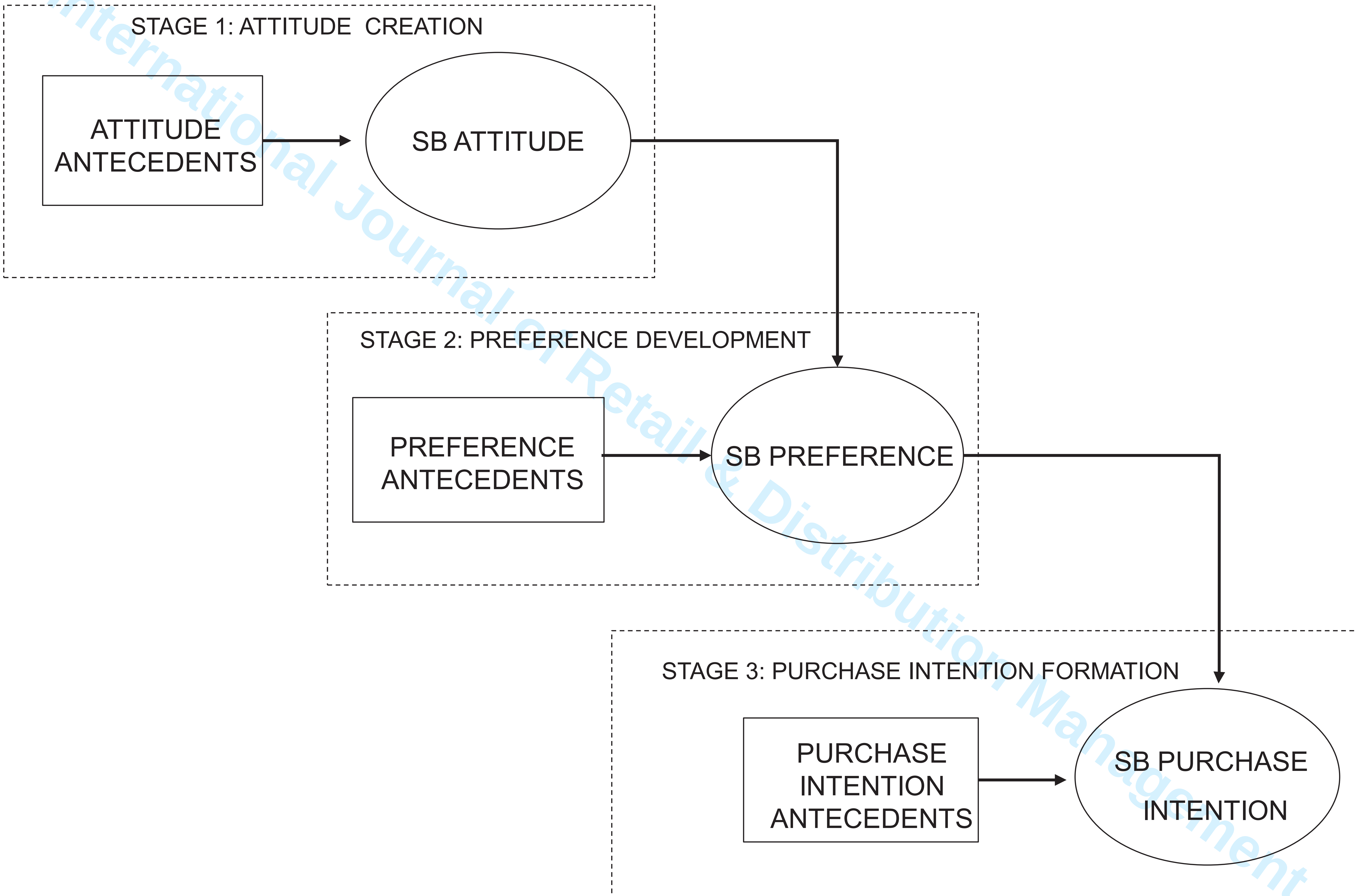

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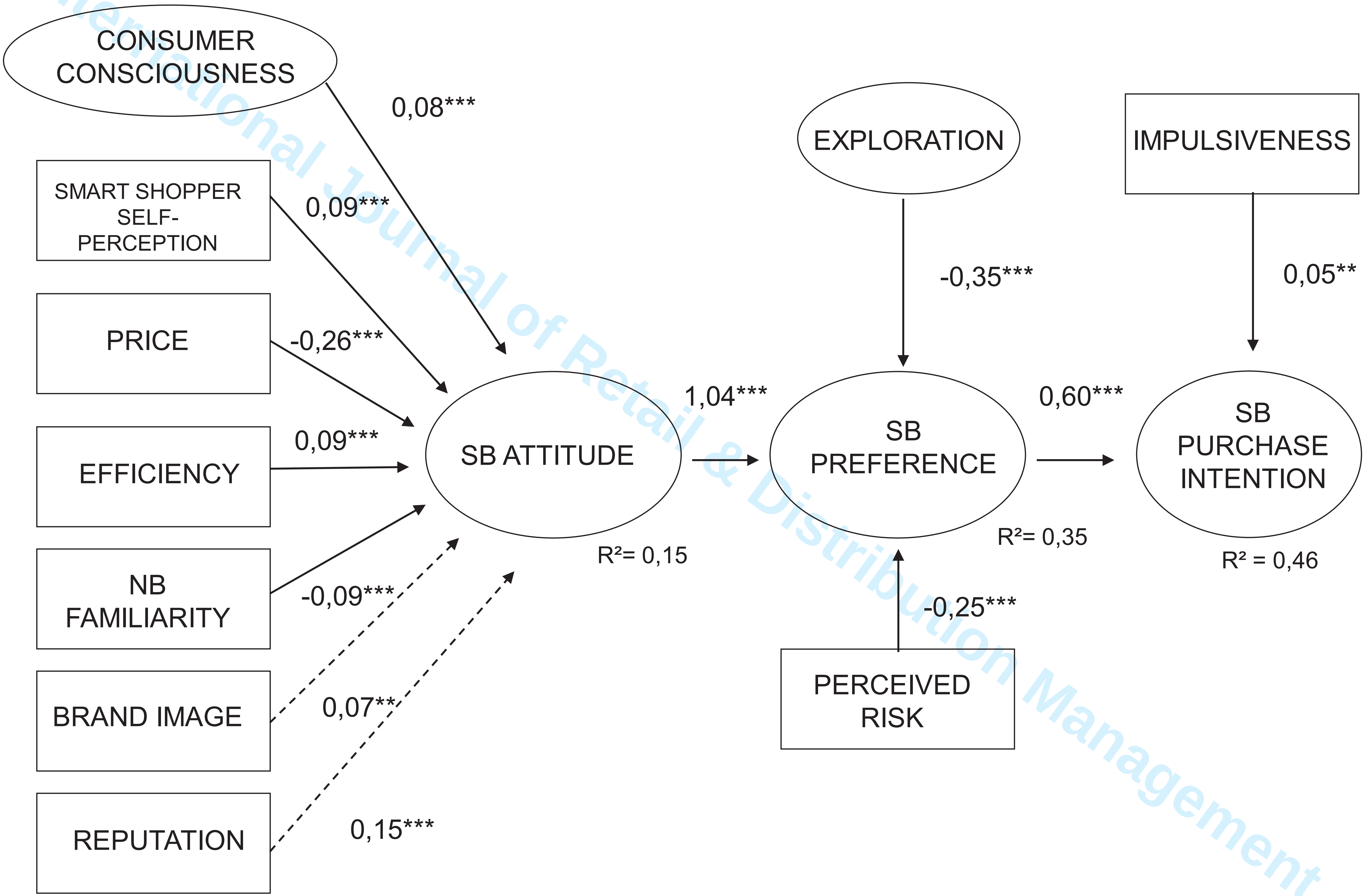

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Tables

Table 1 SB purchase: summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Antecedent	Stage of the decision process: SB Attitude	SB Preference	SB Purchase Intention
H1	SB attitude		Positive relationship	
H2	SB preference			Positive relationship
H3	Consumer consciousness	Positive relationship		
H4	Smart shopper self-perception	Positive relationship		
H5	NB familiarity	Negative relationship		
H6	Perceived risk		Negative relationship	
H7	Exploration		Positive relationship	
H8	Impulsiveness			Positive relationship
H9	Quality inferences made from Price	Negative relationship		
H10	Quality inferences made from Brand Image	Negative relationship		
H11	Quality inferences made from Reputation	Negative relationship		
H12	Quality inferences made from Efficiency	Positive relationship		

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Table 2 Descriptive measures for single indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD
NB familiarity	4.85	1.82
Smart shopper self-perception	5.16	1.22
Perceived risk	3.77	1.66
Impulsiveness	3.66	1.85
Price	2.76	1.72
Brand image	4.89	1.55
Reputation	3.60	1.47
Efficiency	2.83	1.71
SB attitude	4.13	1.81
SB purchase intention	3.90	2.00

Note: Seven-point Likert-type scale

Annex. Main descriptives of the sample

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Spain	Germany	France	UK	Italy	US	Total
Women	79	54	72	99	98	114	516
	40.1%	27.0%	38.5%	53.2%	49.2%	58.2%	44.3%
Men	118	146	115	87	101	82	649
	59.9%	73.0%	61.5%	46.8%	50.8%	41.8%	55.7%
Total	197	200	187	186	199	196	1165
Chi-square = 51.45 p=0.0000							

Table 2. Age

Age	Spain	Germany	France	UK	Italy	US	Total
Less than 25	54	36	61	41	31	17	240
	27.0%	17.8%	32.6%	21.9%	15.6%	8.7%	20.5%
26-35	80	88	79	76	86	40	449
	40.0%	43.6%	42.2%	40.6%	43.2%	20.4%	38.3%
36-45	47	47	32	36	58	41	261
	23.5%	23.3%	17.1%	19.3%	29.1%	20.9%	22.3%
46-55	16	23	13	20	22	47	141
	8.0%	11.4%	7.0%	10.7%	11.1%	24.0%	12.0%
More than 55	3	8	2	14	2	51	80
	1.5%	4,0%	1.1%	7.5%	1.0%	26.0%	6.8%
Total	200	202	187	187	199	196	1171
Chi-square = 227.94 p=0.0000							

Table 3. Work

Work	Spain	Germany	France	UK	Italy	US	Total
Yes	125	173	141	161	168	162	930
	62.8%	85.6%	75.4%	86.6%	84.4%	82.7%	79.6%
No	74	29	46	25	31	34	239
	37.2%	14.4%	24.6%	13.4%	15.6%	17.3%	20.4%
Total	199	202	187	186	199	196	1169
Chi-square = 50.54 p=0.0000							

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Journal of Market Research, Journal of Tourism Research, Tourism Economics, and International Journal of Tourism Research, to mention a few.

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