RESEARCH ARTICLE

Building heritage brand equity through social media sales promotion: The role of Power Distance

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Abstract

This paper aims to look into the moderating effect of individual's cultural characteristics—Power Distance—on the relationship between the use of discounts and gifts and the formation of the brand equity of a heritage tourist site is assessed. The results of a quasi-experimental 2×2 factorial design among Internet users from two countries and using two different promotional stimuli showed: a positive effect of sales promotions on social media on the formation of brand equity of a heritage tourist site; a lesser effect of online price discounts than free gifts; the moderating role of Power Distance on the formation of brand equity.

KEYWORDS
brand equity, discount, gift, heritage tourism, power distance, social networks

1 | INTRODUCTION

Social media have changed the way in which brand-related content is created, distributed, and consumed (Godey et al., 2016). More specifically, social networks are being a crucial element in promoting heritage tourism (Gül & Gül, 2020; Hausmann & Schuhbauer, 2021; Sarkar & George, 2018; Timothy, 2018). Accordingly, most of the firms in the travel and hospitality industry and heritage tourism providers use social networks to communicate with their audiences and engage them with their brands. Indeed, some authors consider the impact of these online channels on consumer journey to be enormous (Hausmann & Schuhbauer, 2021; Stojanovic et al., 2018; Xiang et al., 2015). Likewise, some authors have pointed out that social networks gather an even greater relevance when it comes to developing marketing strategies for heritage tourism site (McMullen, 2020; Munar & Ooi, 2012). Social networks exert an influence on several variables, such as tourists' motivation or inspiration for future trips (Segitur, 2021), due to the fact that through them they access information, plan and share their trips. For this reason, social networks offer new challenges and opportunities for tourism companies in terms of development of the marketing mix and greater knowledge of tourists' preferences (Surugiu & Surugiu, 2015); the possibility of actively interacting with their customers, agilely adapting their offer

to the new needs of the traveler, improving the level of travelers' satisfaction and enhancing their competitive advantage (Hausmann & Weuster, 2017). Despite the relevance of social networks in the development of heritage tourism, there is still a dearth of research on social media and their impact on destination brand performance and brand equity (Lund et al., 2018; Saeed & Shafique, 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018), particularly in the case of heritage tourism site. Likewise, it should be noted that the majority of the extant studies that have examined the role of social networks within heritage tourism destinations management have focused on the use of networks through the prism of promoting the destination, to generate awareness and knowledge of the destination and attract more visitors. In this context, two streams of research emerge. The first stream is based on communicational analysis and aims at responding to the question regarding how the use of social networks can affect the brand and the competitiveness of the destination (McMullen, 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018), while the second one is based on the analysis of specific communication tools that are implemented in social networks and their effect on brand equity.

In this regard, it must be highlighted that sales promotions are the most frequent content on social networks, accounting for 89% of total network content. In turn, these promotions generate the highest number of interactions (50%) and web traffic (49%) (IAB Spain, 2021).

The literature review emphasized the scarce research on the impact of sales promotions via social networks on the brand equity of a heritage destination. Despite the fact that sales promotion is one of the most widely-used communication tools on social networks, further research efforts are still called for to understand its influence on the formation of brand equity.

Given the lack of prior studies on this relationship, it is not surprising that the UNESCO, in its recent report "Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites de 2021", encourages heritage sites to execute and implement marketing strategies and techniques to trigger their opportunities to attract more tourists.

Moreover, Mulvey et al. (2020) suggested that there is clearly a dearth of cross-national studies comparing the use of social networks, calling for further research to look into cross-national differences. In their review of research about cultural differences dealing with Facebook, Wilson et al. (2012) claim that an under-exploited line of research on this topic is the cultural comparison between its users and examining the characteristics of these users is indeed an exceptional opportunity to analyze intra- and inter-cultural trends. Most of the extant research analyzes trends within a given country, and only few studies have compared the cultures of different countries (Gammon, 2014; Karl et al., 2010a, 2010b). Some authors have found that cultural values can influence both the level of use of social networks (Dadgar et al., 2017) and the individual's response to the different marketing stimuli—and, more specifically, to sales promotions (Kwok & Uncles, 2005; Na et al., 2015; Yoo & Donthu, 2002).

When it comes to the introduction of a new tool, such as Facebook, in different cultural contexts, it is likely that the pre-existing cultural practices determine the way this tool is implemented, rather than the tool itself. Among the cultural dimensions, Power Distance, which refers to the degree to which an individual expects and accepts differences in the level of power, status, and wealth across society (Hofstede, 1991), is likely to affect how the individual reacts to a sales promotion on social networks. On the one hand, the framework proposed by Hofstede is the most widely accepted approach, however, on the other hand, it has received several critiques derived from the fact that cultural dimensions are conceptually and empirically different from the individual cultural values measured by other authors (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2017). To address this gap, Sharma (2010) and Yoo et al. (2011) have developed adaptations of Hostede's work to measure individual-based cultural values and their approach has been taken in the present study.

Based on these assumptions, the present study has a dual objective: to gather a better understanding on how online sales promotions affect the formation of heritage brand equity and whether this effect is determined by the culture to which the individual belongs (more specifically, in regard with the Power Distance dimension). Accordingly, this study provides a unique contribution pioneering the examination and understanding of the differential effect exerted by monetary versus non-monetary sales promotions via social networks on heritage brand equity-formation. Moreover, the contribution of this research to the current body of knowledge lies in providing evidence of the link between cultural dimensions and consumer's behavior, looking into the role of Power Distance in the relationship between the sales promotions type (monetary and non-monetary) and the brand equity-formation through social networks. Finally, in terms of managerial implications, the results of this study enable to support managers in the development of effective sales promotions strategies using social networks, encouraging them to take into account the individuals' culture in their decision-making processes.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Social media and brand equity in the tourism sector

Brand equity is considered by academics a key instrument for companies to obtain competitive advantages. Therefore, the creation and maintenance of strong brand equity is a critical factor in the achievement of companies' financial objectives (Aaker, 1996; Yoo et al., 2000). In regard with what it comprises, there have been several conceptualizations that can be found in the academic literature, being the definitions provided by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) the most widely accepted in different fields. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and its symbol that add to, or subtract from, the value provided by a firm's product or service to its customers", while Keller (1993) conceptualized it as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand".

In the field of tourism, Konecnik and Gartner (2007), based on the definition of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), introduced destination brand equity, proposing and testing four dimensions - awareness, image, quality, and loyalty to measure destination brand equity. Subsequently, Kladou and Kehagias (2014) defined destination branding as the marketing activities to create a logo, name, symbol, or other graphic brand element to identify and differentiate a destination from its competitors. Managers of tourism destinations and, more specifically, of heritage destinations must develop strategies that generate brands with high brand equity (Del Barrio-García & Prados-Peña, 2019). In this line, destination brand management together with an appropriate social media strategy are key for the promotion and marketing of tourist destinations (Hadianfar, 2021; McMullen, 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018).

Therefore, marketing activities in general, and communication activities in particular, carried out via social networks, are likely to affect brand equity-generation and maintenance (Ebrahim, 2020). This influence derives from the ability of such communication activities to affect each of the dimensions of the brand equity concept itself (awareness, image, loyalty, perceived quality, and value) (Hadianfar, 2021; Saeed & Shafique, 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2018). In this field, the contributions in the field of tourism made by Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015), Stojanovic et al. (2018) and Saeed and Shafique (2020) are noteworthy. Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) found that interaction with this content influences brand awareness and, in turn, brand

image and, ultimately, destination brand equity. Stojanovic et al. (2018) show that the intensity of social media usage directly influences destination brand equity. Saeed and Shafique (2020), in their study on the impact of social networks on the CBBE components of the destination, provided evidence of the positive effect of social networks on two of its dimensions: awareness and loyalty.

Nevertheless, despite the rise and growing relevance of social media in recent years, empirical studies analyzing the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand equity remain scant (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Ebrahim, 2020; Godey et al., 2016; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020; Saeed & Shafique, 2020), thus a further and in-depth analysis of the effect of marketing tools on brand equity and its facets is still called for.

2.2 | Sales promotions as a generator of heritage brand equity in social networks

Sales promotions are "temporary and tangible monetary or non-monetary incentives intended to have a direct impact on consumer behavior" (Chandon et al., 2000). They have become one of the preferred tools of marketing communications (Tufa & Melese, 2021) and nowadays are one of the most broadly implemented marketing techniques on social networks (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Crespo-Almendros et al., 2022; Crespo-Almendros & Del Barrio-García, 2013). In addition, promotions in social networks favor consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-company interaction (Sicilia et al., 2021), influencing consumer behavior and their relationship with the brand (Laksamana, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018).

Despite being one of the most widely implemented online tools, there is much controversy about whether its influence on brand equity is positive or not. In this regard, the extant literature on traditional (offline) sales promotions has indicated that it can exert both negative (Hu & Yang, 2020; Montaner & Pina, 2008; Yoo et al., 2000) and positive (Crespo-Almendros & Del Barrio-García, 2013; Yang et al., 2016) effects on brand equity.

Nevertheless, there is dearth of studies analyzing how the sales promotions can affect brand equity within the social networks landscape (Raji et al., 2019; Vinh et al., 2019). With these premises, a key research question emerges: how does the use of social media-based sales promotions affect brand equity?

Following Liu et al. (2020), through sales promotions the company aims to build value in the consumers' mind: this tool captures the attention of the user and prompts them to buy the brand in question, switch brand, or try it out, in the case of new users. Such experiences influence brand awareness (Boz et al., 2017; Keller, 2008; Tufa & Melese, 2021) and therefore impact on brand equity (Sugiyarti & Mardiyono, 2021). Sales promotions are also capable of generating positive feelings that will be transferred to the brand. Raji et al. (2019) found positive and significant relationships between advertising and sales promotions content via social networks, hedonic/functional brand image, and behavioral intention, which in turn exerts a positive effect on brand equity.

Vinh et al. (2019) proposed that brands should perform marketing activities, such as sales promotion via social networks, in order to enhance the dimensions of brand equity, and insist on the need for future research to examine social media marketing communications in greater depth, considering sales promotion as a precursor to brand equity.

In the field of tourism, few studies report the effect of online sales promotions on brand equity and its dimensions, being frequent to find works that analyze the effect of social media promotion only on some of the components of brand equity (Belenioti et al., 2019; Hadianfar, 2021; Lai & Vinh, 2013; Maggon & Chaudhry, 2015; Melania & Ellyawati, 2018). In this regard, Hadianfar (2021) showed that social media marketing has a positive impact on the dimensions of brand equity (awareness, image, quality and brand loyalty of the destination), concluding that social media marketing is an effective marketing tool to enhance destination brand equity. Maggon and Chaudhry (2015), in their study within the field of tourism, confirmed the positive relationship between the use of social media marketing and customer loyalty. More specifically, Belenioti et al. (2019) examined the impact of social networks on museum brand equity and found that there is a link between social networks and brand equity dimensions: brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand identity, brand awareness and value.

Lai and Vinh (2013) and Melania and Ellyawati (2018) examined online promotions in the tourism context and found that such promotions significantly and positively affect destination loyalty, suggesting that online promotions provide detailed and relevant information that facilitates travelers' choice of certain tourist destinations. The authors also conclude that a credible online sales promotion is capable of encouraging potential travelers to make repeated purchases.

2.2.1 | Effect of promotion type on brand equity

It is known that virtually all the effects associated with sales promotions will depend on the specific type of promotion used (Crespo-Almendros et al., 2022; Crespo-Almendros & Del Barrio-García, 2013; Raghubir & Corfman, 1999) and the particular benefit associated with it. Its effects on brand awareness and brand equity are therefore also expected to depend on promotion type.

It is entirely possible that the results obtained to date by authors dealing with traditional media are influenced by the type of sales promotions used and the type of benefit they provide. Monetary promotions are linked to utilitarian benefits, which are associated with functional aspects. These aspects have less impact on the recall and identification of the brand than those based on symbolic aspects or hedonic benefits (Kumar & Verma, 2018; Park et al., 1989). Palazón-Vidal and Delgado-Ballester (2005) conclude that, in general, non-monetary promotional initiatives generate greater brand awareness than monetary ones, as they are capable of triggering a greater number of brand associations, and, furthermore, such associations are more favorable. They explain that this result is due to the fact that non-monetary promotions generate more abstract associations

towards the brand than monetary ones, while consumers tend to process abstract associations in more depth, and hence these tend to exert a longer-lasting effect on the consumer's memory. According to Chandon et al. (2000), the ideal promotions for generating brand image are those of a non-monetary nature, mainly because they are more appropriate for creating unique brand associations that reinforce brand image (Kumar & Verma, 2018).

When the purchase decision is based on hedonic motivation, it generates a more favorable consumer attitude towards the brand (Childers et al., 2001). Therefore, it can be inferred that, if the sales promotion is hedonic and then associated with feelings, emotions, experiential benefits, and so on, it will likely generate more favorable associations towards the heritage brand. Sales promotions can generate both hedonic and utilitarian benefits, but the latter are found especially when a monetary incentive (for example, discounts) is used, while the former ones are more evident when a non-monetary is at place (for example, free gifts) (Chandon et al., 2000). It follows, then, that not all sales promotions will be negative for the brand (Inman et al., 1990). For example, in the case of online gifts, and provided that the gift is congruent with the brand image (Chandon et al., 2000), sales promotions will help generate beliefs about the brand that are unrelated to the price to be paid, thus its influence on brand attitude is more likely to be positive. Thus, the free gift offered as part of the sales promotions will be helping the consumer to build their internal image of the heritage brand and generate brand equity (Buil et al., 2013). Shi et al. (2005) note that in-store demonstrations are able to generate positive attitudes towards new products as they help consumers to obtain information and experience about the product, reducing their resistance to the adoption of new products by lowering some of the functional and psychological barriers. In this case, sales promotion triggers the generation of beliefs towards the brand that are unrelated to the price to be paid, thus its influence on the attitude towards the brand is most likely to be positive.

Monetary sales promotions can generate a negative attitude towards the brand, since they make the consumer attribute the purchase to the discount provided and not to the qualities of the product/brand, resulting in lower brand evaluations (Davis et al., 1992). Such promotions are relatively easy to understand and increase transaction utility since they can be easily evaluated rationally and are focused on the 'price' attribute. This leads the consumer to integrate promotions as part of the price of the product affecting the internal reference prices (Diamond & Campbell, 1989), damaging the brand image in the long run. Therefore, the evaluations of monetary incentives will probably be less favorable than in the case of non-monetary incentives, due to the fact that they will increase the individual's price sensitivity and decrease reference prices (Álvarez & Vázquez, 2005; Mela et al., 1997; Mela et al., 1998; Ortmeyer & Huber, 1991). In addition, if the promotional period is very long, or the sales promotions are very frequent, it will be difficult to convince the customer to pay a higher price at the end of the promotion. All this will result in negative associations with the brand, which will turn into an unfavorable attitude towards it (Faircloth et al., 2001).

The sales promotion incentive enables the brand to communicate information about the product's characteristics and/or benefits, contributing to building the brand image and, therefore, generating brand equity. In other words, the more consistency there is in the sales promotion incentives with all brand communications, the greater the brand equity generated (Dahlén & Lange, 2004; Lange & Dahlén, 2003).

Therefore, when it comes to generating positive attitudes towards the brand, non-monetary incentives are more appropriate (Calvo & Reinares, 2001) because they (1) are capable of generating surprise, emotions and satisfying desires; (2) give the consumer an additional motive to satisfy the desire of purchasing the product; (3) are tangible symbols and increase brand awareness through recall, and (4) are not associated with a monetary discount, thus they do not influence reference prices, as is the case with monetary promotions, and therefore do not increase consumer price sensitivity.

According to the above-rationale, this research is based on the idea that non-monetary promotions are appropriate to generate brand equity because through demonstrations, games and other non-monetary promotions, an increase in the brand information gathered by the consumer and a greater experience of the product are generated (Shi et al., 2005). The exposure of the individual to the non-monetary incentive generates brand associations based on the characteristics that can be related to such incentive and be consistent with the purchased brand.

Therefore, the type of sales promotion used can generate different reactions in the consumer and, therefore, in the formation of brand equity. It is to be expected that the same result will be observed in social networks and that the use of monetary or non-monetary promotions will affect the generation of brand equity. However, and despite the importance of acknowledging these effects, after the massive use of sales promotion in social networks, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous empirical studies have analyzed how the type of promotion used in social networks (monetary vs. non-monetary) will affect the generation of brand equity of heritage destinations, and it is necessary to analyze it. With these premises, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H1.** Non-monetary sales promotions in social networks will generate greater brand equity than monetary sales promotions.

2.3 | The moderating effect of power distance on the influence of sales promotions on heritage brand equity in social networks

The users of social networks form an ecosystem in which people from different cultures and ethnicities, and with different social characteristics, intermingle. In the case of traditional media, there is a range of studies concluding that cultural values can influence the individual's response to different marketing stimuli and, in particular, to sales promotions (Barone & Roy, 2010; Kwok & Uncles, 2005; McNeill, 2006; McNeill et al., 2014; Yoo & Donthu, 2002).

Among the cultural dimensions that have been analyzed by the literature, that of Power Distance is known to be highly likely to affect the way in which the individual reacts to a sales promotion on social networks. Power Distance reflects an individual's level of acceptance of the fact that there are societal differences in terms of power, status, and wealth (Hofstede, 1991). According to Lee et al. (2020), those users with high Power Distance are less sensitive to price while those with low Power Distance are more sensitive. This is because those with high Power Distance seek quick solutions to ambiguous situations or problems and have an aversion to uncertainty (Kruglanski, 2013). Thus, in cultures characterized by high Power Distance, consumers tend to avoid sales promotions techniques that require them to actively request the discount (such as by presenting coupons or discount vouchers) and prefer those that are available to all (price reductions) (McNeill, 2006). By contrast, people from cultures with low Power Distance scores prefer to focus on the price rather than the brand itself, and therefore gravitate towards those promotions that offer equal incentives for everyone (such as discounts, coupons, and so on).

Yoo and Donthu (2002) perform a model of brand equity formation and try to test whether cultural variables affect its formation. They found that the price positively affects quality perception, regardless of whether countries show a high or low Power Distance and that, on the contrary, price-based sales promotions negatively affect this variable. They conclude that the effect of price and the use of price-based sales promotions is invariant to changes in Power Distance. However, the perception of quality formed as a result of these marketing stimuli is transferred differently to brand equity, with countries with greater Power Distance showing a larger and more positive effect of perceived quality on brand equity.

Asare and Lei (2017) replicated the model proposed by Yoo and Donthu (2002) and showed that the effect of sales promotions on brand equity depends on the consumers' cultural characteristics. These authors, unlike Yoo and Donthu (2002), show how the effect of price on perceived quality, is different depending on the country of origin, being it positive in both cases and higher in the case of countries with high scores of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Nevertheless, the effect of price-based sales promotion on perceived quality and image is the same, regardless of the respondents' country of origin. They also found that the influence of perceived quality on brand equity is invariant.

Therefore, since the effect of price on perceived quality differs from the consumer's cultural characteristics, especially from the distance to power, and given that the consumer's perceived quality is a dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1991), it can be postulated that the effect of price on brand equity will depend on cultural variables.

Thus, it is expected that, in the case of social networks, the user's Power Distance will moderate the effect of obtaining each type of promotional incentive on brand equity. Those users with a high-Power Distance score will accept (and prefer) non-monetary promotions, as these provide the symbols and signs of distinction that they expect, generating a more positive attitude towards the brand and, therefore, greater brand equity than in the case of monetary promotions. By
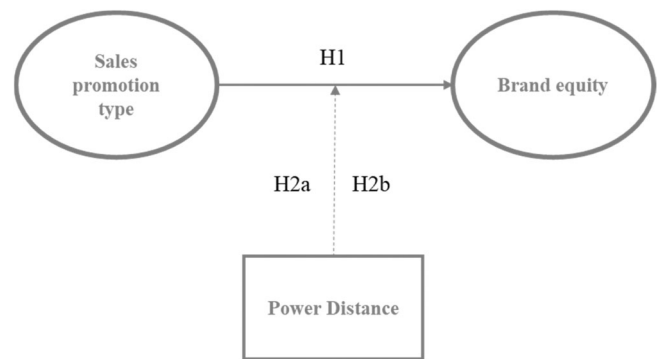
FIGURE 1 The proposed conceptual model

contrast, those users with a low Power Distance score will generate less brand equity in the case of non-monetary sales promotions, compared to monetary ones, as the latter type of promotion highlights differences and inequalities between users that they tend to tolerate less. On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> **H2a.** Non-monetary sales promotions in social networks will generate greater brand equity than monetary sales promotions among those users with a high-Power Distance score.

> **H2b.** Monetary sales promotions in social networks will generate greater brand equity than non-monetary sales promotions among those users with a low Power Distance score.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model and shows the hypotheses formulated in this study.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Independent variables

To test the proposed hypotheses, an online quasi-experimental 2×2 factorial design was conducted on Internet users with different Power Distance levels (low vs. high), based on two different promotional stimuli (discount vs. gift). Two countries were chosen (Spain vs. United State) to increase the variability of individual Power Distance, since these two countries have a relatively higher and lower national Power Distance levels, respectively (Hofstede, 1991). Spain was chosen as a high-power distance representative country and the United States as a low-power distance representative. It is important to do so in order to ensure that we obtain individuals with heterogeneous levels for the Power Distance variable. In other words, the aim is to obtain a sample of users with as heterogeneous levels of Power distance as possible so that we can see how variations in this variable lead to changes in the effect of the type of promotion on the dependent variable, in this case Brand Equity.
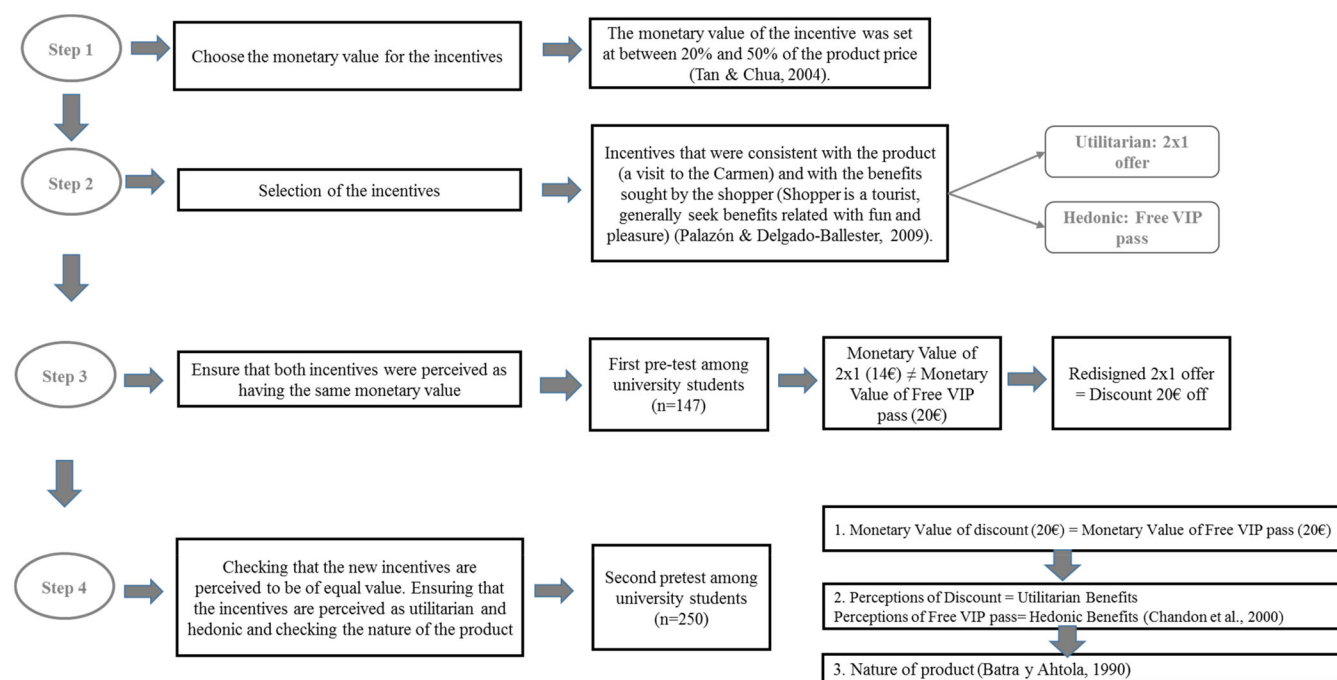
FIGURE 2 Procedures for the creation of the promotional stimuli [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Facebook was chosen as the social networking platform on which to focus in this study, since it is the most widely-used and internationally-known social network and this research centers on profiles of individual users and how these connect with specific information. Within this platform, we selected the profile of the Spanish heritage site classified as a "Site of Cultural Interest" within Spain, namely "Carmen de la Fundación Rodríguez-Acosta", to which we attached the promotional incentives.

3.2 | Creation of experimental stimuli

Two types of promotional stimuli were created to examine the extent to which firms' use of discounts and free gifts on social networks affects brand equity. To select the promotional incentives, the recommendations of different authors were followed, and the monetary value of the incentive was set at between 20% and 50% of the product price (Tan & Chua, 2004), the product being an entrance ticket to the Carmen and gardens. Figure 2 summarizes the procedures followed to create the promotional stimuli.

The promotional stimuli used in the study are shown in Appendix 1.

3.3 | Subject-selection and fieldwork

Once the experimental stimuli had been established, the quasi-experimental design was implemented using the Qualtrics web platform for the data-collection, which was conducted via a panel of Internet users provided by "Sondea Internet SL", resulting in a sample comprising 1399 subjects (732 Spaniards and 609 Americans).

The stages of the experimentation procedure were as follows. First, users were recruited by the panel and transferred to one of the 2 URLs that included the questionnaire and a different experimental stimulus. Second, participants were randomly assigned to each experimental stimulus and, therefore, to each URL and, third, having followed the assigned URL, the participants were presented with an initial paragraph with instructions on how to participate in the experiment. To ensure that the user's language proficiency and their level of knowledge about the "Carmen de la Fundación Rodriguez-Acosta" would not affect the results, they were required to answer a series of questions assessing their level of Spanish (only for foreigners) and their level of knowledge about the Carmen. To assess the Spanish language proficiency, seven points Likert scale composed of nine items was used. Accordingly, the maximum level that native would achieve is 63 points, thus to ensure high accurate comprehension of the questionnaire and the experimental stimuli we considered that overcoming the 80% of the maximum score is needed. With this premise, the users whose level of Spanish was not high, that is the ones who did not achieve at least 54 out of the 63 points of the scale used, were excluded from the analysis. In this stage, we also collected scores for the individual cultural value Power Distance (PD). Afterwards, participants were asked to watch the two-minute promotional video about the Carmen, to enable them to form an image of it, should they not have come across it previously. In addition, they were asked to look through the Facebook profile of the Carmen containing the relevant promotional stimulus. To do so, a tool provided by Qualtrics served was used to add a pop-up that was visible for 2 min and during this time-span the participant could navigate the profile freely. To create the pop-up, a computer expert was assigned to create a fictional Facebook profile, copied in real time from the Carmen's authentic profile.

This was identical to the real one, and identical in the two cases, except for the fact that the dummy version included the experimental stimulus selected in each case. The participants were not aware at any time that they were browsing a fake profile, as it was fully functioning. After 2 min, the pop-up closed automatically and led the participants to continue answering the survey. As a final step, they were asked to respond to questions related to their sociodemographic profile, overall brand equity, and the manipulation check.

3.4 | Measures

The 7-point Likert scale developed by Yoo et al. (2011) and widely applied in academic literature was selected to measure Power Distance. Hofstede's approach has been considered not adapted to the changes happened in cultural values since its proposal. In addition, there is variability among the individuals of a country, so that a national score can hardly represent all individuals. This is due to the fact that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are conceptually and empirically different from individual cultural values as measured by other authors (Sharma, 2010). Yoo et al. (2011) suggested that Hofstede's proposal is not appropriate for studies analyzing the effect of cultural orientation of individuals and performed a research study on individual attitudes and behaviors, gathering information that came from individuals as the same primary source, to develop the measurement instrument named 'CVSCALE'. The approach they used to measure cultural dimensions allows companies to find equivalent cross-national market segments that are based on groups with similar cultural orientations (Yoo et al., 2011), enabling the creation of common or similar strategies for such segments, and making adaptations when it is required. Based on this conceptual framework, in this study we opted to focus on individual cultural values.

Brand equity was measured adopting the 7-point Likert scale proposed by Im et al. (2012). Finally, the level of Spanish language proficiency was assessed using a Likert scale developed by Luna and Peracchio (2001) only for foreigners, to ensure understanding of both the promotional stimuli and the questionnaire. See Appendix 2.

4 | DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 | Validation of scales and manipulation check

To verify that the incentives used were perceived as having equal monetary value, the procedure established by Nunes and Park (2003) and later used by Palazón-Vidal and Delgado-Ballester (2005) was used. The t-test corroborated the absence of significant differences in the perceived value of the different incentives, which confirmed that the incentive based on the gift was perceived as being worth around €20 ($p > 0.05$), corresponding to the value of the monetary incentive.

To ascertain whether it was a mainly hedonic or utilitarian gift, we calculated the average scores obtained by the benefits associated with each group and calculated a mean difference test for independent samples. The results confirmed that there were significant differences between the utilitarian and hedonic indices associated with the monetary discount ($p < 0.05$) and also for the gift of the VIP pass ($p < 0.05$). The discount was perceived as primarily associated with utilitarian values, while the gift was associated with clearly hedonic values.

It was also found that the experimental groups were equally distributed in terms of composition and size (discount: 712; gift: 686). Performing a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, it was found that there were no significant differences between the two groups ($p > 0.05$).

As a preliminary step to the hypotheses testing, the validity and reliability of the multi-item scales used were assessed. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) enabled to conclude that the measures had good psychometric properties: all parameters were significant, the fit indicators, average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability (CR) meeting the recommended cut-offs (Hair et al., 2010) (see Tables 1 and 2).

4.2 | Testing the hypotheses

To analyze the influence of discounts and gifts on the formation of brand equity in social media, and the effect that Power Distance exerts on this relationship, a moderation model proposed by de Preacher et al. (2007) was carried out on 10,000 samples obtained via bootstrapping. More specifically, we opted for using the model 1, which includes a dependent variable, an independent variable and a quantitative moderator. The dependent variable was Brand Equity, the independent variable was the type of promotion displayed and the moderator was the power distance, which was calculated as the mean of the 5 items included in the scale proposed by Yoo et al. (2011).

The proposed model explains 11% of the variability in the brand equity variable (see Tables 3 and 4) and the data analysis showed that sales promotions-type exerts a significant influence on brand equity ($\beta_{\text{sales promotion t} \rightarrow \text{Brand equity}}$: -1.13; $p = 0.01$) (see Table 3), thus providing evidence to statistically support H1.

Moreover, a direct effect of Power Distance on brand equity ($\beta_{\text{power distance} \rightarrow \text{Brand equity}} = 0.13$; $p = 0.00$) emerged, while Power Distance was found to have a quasi-significant moderating effect ($p < 0.10$) on the relationship between promotion type and brand equity ($\beta_{\text{sales promotion*power distance} \rightarrow \text{Brand equity}} = 0.04$; $p = 0.07$). It is therefore demonstrated that the greater the user's Power Distance, the better the brand equity scores obtained as a result of the use of the sales promotions on social networks. Gifts generate greater brand equity among users with low Power Distance, while for those with high Power Distance both promotions generate a similar impact on brand equity, which was contrary to expectations, as expressed in H2a and H2b (see Figure 3).

TABLE 1 Reliability and validity of the measurement scales

Items	Construct	Standardized coefficients	t- value	R^2	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
PD 1	Power Distance	0.77	[a]	0.59	0.88	0.91	0.69
PD 2		0.81	40.84	0.66			
PD 3		0.87	43.70	0.75			
PD 4		0.78	38.48	0.61			
PD 5		0.78	38.37	0.61			
BE_1	Brand Equity	0.86	[a]	0.73	0.9381	0.939	0.837
BE_2		0.95	71.74	0.90			
BE_3		0.92	77.67	0.84			
LP_1	Language Proficiency	0.69	[a]	0.47	0.9593	0.901	0.797
LP_2		0.71	10.01	0.50			
LP_3		0.75	11.32	0.56			
LP_4		0.67	10.98	0.44			
LP_5		0.66	10.24	0.46			
LP_6		0.74	10.99	0.55			
LP_7		0.74	10.93	0.54			
LP_8		0.68	9.85	0.47			
LP_9		0.74	10.42	0.55			

Note: Satorra-Bentler Chi-Square: 0.33 (d.f.: 19); *p*-value: 0.01; RMSEA: 0.03; NFI: 0.99; CFI: 1.00; IFI: 1.00; Critical N: 930.37.
[a]Parameter fixed at 1 to fix the scale of the latent construct (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). *t*-value cut-offs (level of significance): 1.64 ($p < 0.10$); 1.98 ($p < 0.05$); 2.58 ($p < 0.01$).

TABLE 2 Discriminant validity

	Power Distance	Brand equity
Power Distance	**0.48**	0.26
Brand Equity	0.26	**0.70**

Note: Diagonal elements in bold are the square root of the AVE between the constructs and their indicators. Off-diagonal elements are correlations between the constructs.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 | Findings

Brands showing great brand equity bring great advantages and benefits to institutions and business companies, thus the identification of the factors exerting negative and/or positive effects on brand equity is crucial. The ability to attract visitors and to enhance their level of engagement are key issues to measure the success for museums, galleries, cultural and heritage attractions at a global scale, developing effective marketing and communication strategies being paramount (Vero, 2012). In today's digital environment, characterized by a considerable increase in the use of social networks in online communication between the consumer and the firm, the visitors of these attractions receive information from a wide range of channels, thus there is a need to analyze how this new form of communication and also marketing actions affect brand equity.

First, the results have shown that sales promotions on social media have a positive and significant effect on the formation of brand

equity of a heritage tourist destination, in line with Boz et al. (2017) and Crespo-Almendros and Del Barrio-García (2013), highlighting that the promotions based on symbolic aspects or on hedonic benefits (non-monetary promotions) have a greater effect on brand equity, compared with monetary promotions associated with utilitarian benefits. This result is in line with the findings of Park et al. (1989) and Buil et al. (2013). In other words, in line with Chandon et al. (2000) and Kumar & Verma, 2018, the ideal promotions for generating heritage brand equity on social networks are those of a non-monetary nature.

Second, it has been demonstrated that culture—in particular, Power Distance—in social networks has a quasi-significant moderating effect on the formation of brand equity.

The greater the Power Distance, the greater the effect of the sales promotions on brand equity, there being different effects depending on promotion type and individual cultural values. For example, gifts generate greater brand equity among users with low Power Distance. However, for those with high Power Distance, both types of promotion generate a similar impact on brand equity. These findings are in line with the study conducted by McNeill (2006) and are inconsistent with prior research, demonstrating that those users with high Power Distance are less sensitive to price, while those with low Power Distance are more sensitive (Lee et al., 2020). As mentioned above, individuals with high Power Distance seek quick solutions to problems and show an aversion to uncertainty (Kruglanski, 2013), so they avoid those sales promotion techniques that require them to actively ask for the discount (McNeill, 2006). Therefore, it is possible that the results obtained are due precisely to the fact that there are no differences between the two

TABLE 3 Moderated analysis. Outcome variable: Brand equity

|	Coeff. Effect	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	
Constant	13.01	0.34	37.87	0.00	12.34	13.69
Sales Promotion (X)	−1.13	0.01	7.56	0.01*	0.09	0.16
Power Distance (W)	0.13	0.48	−2.33	0.00*	−2.09	−0.18
X*W	0.04	0.02	1.66	0.07	0.00	0.08

Note: *$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 4 Conditional effects of sales promotion type on brand equity

PD value	Coeff. Effect	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	
9.20	−0.76	0.34	−2.23	0.02*	−1.43	−0.09
17.95	0.40	0.21	−1.91	0.05*	−0.82	0.00
26.70	−0.05	0.24	−0.22	0.82	−0.52	0.41

Note: *$p < 0.01$.

FIGURE 3 Moderating effect of Power Distance on the relationship between promotion type and brand equity [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
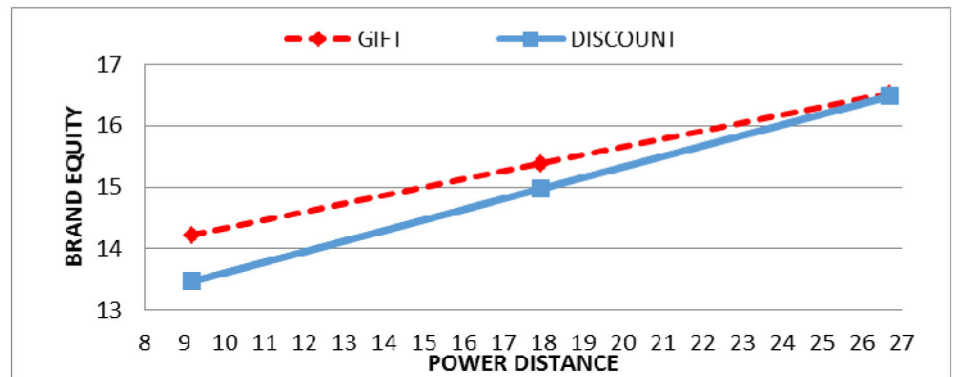
incentives in terms of the effort that an individual must make to obtain them and that the level of uncertainty involved is low, since both incentives were obtained with online purchases.

5.2 | Theoretical contribution

Based on the findings discussed in the previous sub-section, the present empirical research contributes to the literature on sales promotion by providing knowledge and evidence about the effects that the application of different sales promotion techniques (monetary vs. non-monetary) in social networks exerts when it comes to build heritage brand equity. Therefore, this work covers the absence of literature indicated by Dwivedi et al. (2019), Ebrahim (2020), Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020) and Saeed and Shafique (2020). More importantly, this work pioneers the analysis of how culture and, more specifically, power distance affects the consumer's reaction to different sales promotions in social networks. Previous studies in the field of traditional media, such as McNeill (2006) and McNeill et al. (2014), conclude that cultural values can influence an individual's response to different marketing stimuli and, in particular, to sales promotions. The analysis also sought to understand how Power Distance may affect the influence of discounts and free gifts on brand equity-generation in social networks, especially in the case of brands associated with a heritage site, and thus the

influence of Power Distance and sales promotions in the field of heritage tourism. Finally, the study presented in this paper also contributes significantly to the current body of knowledge in the field of social media marketing communication and cross-cultural analysis.

5.3 | Managerial contributions

According to the above-presented findings, the managers of heritage sites and tourist destinations must take into account that sales promotions implemented in social networks can contribute to generating and strengthening the brand equity associated with the heritage site. Not only do social networks increase awareness of the destination, but online promotions also provide relevant information that helps potential visitors both choose the destination and also repeat or recommend it as a result of an increase in loyalty.

In light of these results, it is advisable to use online promotions of a hedonic rather than a monetary nature. Examples of this approach include promotions such as special-invitation open days, visits to parts of a site usually not open to the public, special area of the month, exclusive guided tour by invitation, or invitations to heritage interpretation events delivered by experts (piece of the month, picture of the month, and so on), all of which will have a greater effect on brand equity. It is therefore important that the managers of cultural destinations are aware of the

importance of having an adequate and effective communication strategy that enhances the brand equity associated with the heritage landmark. Finally, the professional arena should acknowledge the role that Power Distance plays when it comes to the generation of brand equity, especially in the case of choosing gifts as the sales promotions type, since they are likely to generate greater brand equity among users characterized by low Power Distance, while when targeting those individuals with high power distance no significant differences emerged in terms of impact on brand equity. This implication represents a valuable input into the decision-making processes of managers of cultural destinations and/or their partners (such as, advertising and communication agencies), especially in designing and developing their sales promotions campaigns.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article has a number of limitations as any research work. First, performing an experimental study implies a certain artificial setting, despite the efforts made with the design of the experiment and the development of the field work to obtain that the conditions of the exhibition of the promotion were as likely as possible. Thus, future research is encouraged to replicate this methodology using different services categories and types in order to broaden the external validity of the findings. Second, other factors caused by country differences, such us other cultural dimensions or social economics differences, can influence the results. Therefore, further studies are called for to examine the effects of other cultural and national differences on Brand Equity formation. Third, the respondents' attitude towards the advertisement was not taken into consideration. In light of this, future studies can focus on the effect of other mediating or moderating variables, such as individuals' attitude towards the advertisement and other social networking platforms, such as Instagram, given its positive trend and increasing adoption. In addition, the moderating role of power distance has been studied, using promotional stimuli in Spanish among Spaniards and Americans. Thus, it would be advisable to extend this research to other cultures via cross-cultural studies. Finally, future research studies are encouraged to shed light on the effect of Power Distance on the effectiveness of monetary of non-monetary sales promotions in terms of brand equity generation. In this regard, as mentioned earlier in this manuscript, the results obtained in this study are not in line with the findings gathered by previous studies, thus further research efforts are called for to clarify the role of Power Distance.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data available on request from the authors.

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APPENDIX 1

Screenshot of the experimental stimuli [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

(Monetary Stimulus)

¿Aún no tienes planes? Ven y visítanos y no te pierdas un inolvidable día disfrutando del ambiente cultural e histórico de la Fundación Rodríguez Acosta. Además, durante este mes con tu compra de una entrada de visita combinada te regalamos otra para quien tú quieras. Más información.

(Non-monetary stimulus)

¿Aún no tienes planes? Ven y visítanos y no te pierdas un inolvidable día disfrutando del ambiente cultural e histórico de la Fundación Rodríguez Acosta. Además, durante este mes cuéntanos en Facebook ¿cuál ha sido tu rincón favorito? Y consigue un pase VIP a la Biblioteca para dos con guía y cóctel incluido. Más información

APPENDIX 2

Power distance

PD 1. People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions.

PD 2. People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently.

PD 3. People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions.

PD 4. People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions.

PD 5. People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions.

Brand equity

BE_1. It makes sense to choose this destination rather than another one even if they are similar.

BE_2. Even if there is another destination with the same characteristics, I prefer this one.

BE_3. If there is another destination as good as this one, I still prefer this one

Language proficiency

LP_1. Understand cooking directions, such as those in a recipe.

LP_2. Understand newspaper headlines.

LP_3. Read personal letters or notes written to you

LP_4. Read popular novels without using a dictionary

LP_5. Make out a shopping list

LP_6. Fill out a job application form requiring information about your interests and qualifications.

LP_7. Write a letter to a friend

LP_8. Leave a note for somebody explaining where you will be or when you will come home

LP_9. Write an advertisement to sell a bicycle