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ABSTRACT

Omni-channel management is an increasingly popular strategy that involves creating multiple forms of contact between brands and customers to maximise interaction and thereby generate global brand experiences, which can constitute a competitive advantage. The television-series sector is no exception to this phenomenon. The aim of the present research is to examine the effect of television-drama-series brand experience on the generation of word-of-mouth communication among viewers. The study analyses the moderating effect of viewers' gender and culture – specifically, the individualism/collectivism variable proposed by Geert Hofstede, – in the context of series with high vs. low levels of sexual and violent content. The results indicate that these variables exert a moderating effect on the relationship between brand experience and word-of-mouth only in the case of TV drama series with a low level of such content. Women and culturally-individualistic audiences will be more prone to the experience-based generation of word-of-mouth for this type of television series.

1. Introduction

Watching television (TV) is today's most popular form of media consumption (Fossen and Bleier 2021). This popularity has been influenced, among other factors, by technological developments, including the rise of online distribution services for multimedia content or streaming platforms that have led to a substantial change in how TV is consumed (Petridis 2021). Thus, platforms such as Netflix, the Amazon Prime video-streaming service, or Disney +, among others, had accumulated 1004.6 million subscribers between them, worldwide, by 2020 (Digital TV Research 2021). TV-series producers and distributors are inevitably joining the omni-channel management trend, understood as the synergistic management of all available channels and customer touch-points (Verhoef, Kannan, and Inmann 2015). Omni-channel strategies enable viewers to achieve a unique and meaningful experience in relation to the content they watch. For the company, they enable a solid competitive position to be built (based on the consumer–viewer experience), which is essential in an increasingly competitive and dynamic market (Yu et al. 2021). As drama series are the TV

products in highest demand among audiences, with 34.7% of demand share in the case of the United States (US) (Statista 2021), it is necessary to understand how viewers respond to the brand experience provided by their favourite TV drama series.

'Brand experience' refers to the consumer's subjective responses to stimuli conveyed by the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). This construct has been studied by the literature in different contexts such as tourism (e.g., Ahn and Back 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al. 2020); online brands (e.g., Baek et al. 2020; Ha and Perks 2005; Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou 2013); blogs (e.g., Chen and Lin 2015); banks (e.g., Martillo and Polo 2021); the medical sector (e.g., Kumar, Dash, and Purwar 2013); and airlines (e.g., Lin 2015), among others. However, no studies analysing brand experience in the audio-visual industry have been identified, despite the fact that consumers, in general – and TV-series viewers, in particular – receive constant visual and auditory stimulation, such as the series-brand's own images, colours, typographies, logos, slogans, or characters, all of which create attachment and shape the brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Yu and Yuan 2019).

The literature also highlights that word-of-mouth (WOM), defined as interpersonal, non-formal communication about a brand or product with a high capacity to influence consumers (Ansary and Hashim 2018; Harrison-Walker 2001), affects popularity and sales in the audio-visual industry (Yeh 2015). Thus, knowing how WOM is generated is important for audio-visual companies, as this phenomenon is highly influential in the first phase of the life of a new TV programme or series (Cadario 2015). Given the omni-channel context under study, which has inherently boosted personal communication mechanisms as part of the diversity of consumer–brand touch-points, the present study aims to examine some of the factors that may shape WOM. This variable has been found to have the capacity to influence consumer behaviour (Chen et al. 2014) and is considered a result of brand experience (Khan and Fatma 2017).

Additionally, the international reach of TV programmes, in general, and TV series, in particular, calls for studies with a cultural perspective that can help shape the design of marketing strategies to ensure effective targeting of different national markets. Hence, given that WOM is a communication mechanism between non-commercial subjects, the present study examines consumers' cultural differences in terms of the individualism/collectivism variable taken from the framework developed by Hofstede (1980, 2001).

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to examine the direct effect of the brand experience of TV-drama series viewers on their intention to generate WOM, moderated by their gender and high vs. low levels of individualism/collectivism. The existence of differences in these relationships depending on the level of sexual and violent content of the TV series in question is also considered. To achieve this objective, we measure the possible moderating effects using PROCESS software (Hayes 2018). This enables us to detect the existence of a significant effect of individualism/collectivism and gender on the generation of WOM in the case of women and of individualistic audiences for TV drama series with a low level of sexual and violent content.

The conclusions of this research highlight the need to focus on the viewer experience of TV series and its effect on the generation of WOM, taking into account the differences between the viewer's level of individualism/collectivism and gender. Recommendations are provided for TV-series producers and broadcasters in honing their marketing strategies, especially in an omni-channel context.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Omni-channel management in the TV sector

As noted earlier, omni-channel management is understood as the synergistic manage-ment of all available channels and customer touch-points to optimise the customer experience across all channels (Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman 2015, 176). This approach consequently includes the different distribution channels that enable the transfer of the product from the supplier to the end-consumer, including those communication chan-nels that are corporate-owned (Ailawadi and Farris 2017). This requires the coordination of the different channels to be managed strategically (Öztürk and Okumus 2018). Once this is achieved, an omni-channel strategy facilitates brand–consumer interaction based on a unique and meaningful consumer experience that will result in greater value for customers, as well as increased brand loyalty (Öztürk and Okumuş 2018; Wang et al. 2018).

The TV ecosystem has been drastically altered in recent years thanks to technological advances and the notable increase in live and on-demand TV content, which exceeds 20,000 TV programmes (Abreu et al. 2015). Content-distributors require highly-effective omni-channel distribution and marketing strategies, given that consumers will tend to seek-out those providers that facilitate more personalised content (Goff Inglis and Zolfaghari 2017). To this end, some production companies develop 'second screen' applications, such as social networks, which enable viewers to share their experiences of a TV product, creating and disseminating information related to programmes or series in real time (Vanattenhoven and Geerts 2016). Here, the concept of Social Television enters the frame. This is defined as the social practice of commenting on TV programmes with friends and strangers who are connected to each other via the simultaneous use of different digital devices and channels (such as TV, smartphones, and social media) (Selva 2015). This is distinct from interactive TV, which refers to the use of a technological device that enables viewers to browse content to customise the offer to their preferences (AIMC 2015). Social Television has important business implications because it enables compa-nies to evaluate viewer responses to content in real time on social networks (Fossen and Schweidel 2017).

All of these applications have become an integral aspect of media experiences, given viewers' growing interest in sharing their TV viewing habits, as they encourage remote social interaction with other viewers (Holanda et al. 2015; Vanattenhoven and Geerts 2016). In this sense, companies such as Nielsen have begun to incorporate social analytics as an audience metric for TV programmes (Goff Inglis and Zolfahari 2017).

In the case of TV series, Wilson (2016) offers some examples of complementary applications that seek to enhance the experience of the TV series in question. Thus, for the third season of 'Sherlock' (BBC 2010–2017), an interactive trailer in the style of the detective genre was produced especially for iPhones and iPads, offering exclusive con-tent, previews of the new season, and interviews with the cast. The BBC also included an interactive trailer that linked to its website and social networks. Another example is the project created for 'The Walking Dead' (AMC 2010–), which was developed for the run-up to a new season, to be used in parallel with the TV narrative, allowing viewers to play thematic games and participate in online conversations while watching the series. Other

apps have also been created to provide information related to the show, such as maps showing the location of each character, recaps, and bonus content (Vanattenhoven and Geerts 2016).

The incorporation of the 'second screen' through this type of application provides a more active viewer-experience than the traditional approach (Vanattenhoven and Geerts 2016). It engages the audience *prior* to broadcast and maintains an engaged community *after* broadcast, due to the lived experience that viewers share (Wilson 2016).

In short, the adoption of an omni-channel perspective is gradually changing the way that broadcasters communicate with consumers of experiential or entertainment products such as films and TV series (Goff Inglis and Zolfaghari 2017). This shift gives rise to the need to know how consumers think, feel, and respond in the booming TV-series sector (Öztürk and Okumuş 2018), highlighting two phenomena in particular: the viewer's experience with the brand, and the interactions that can be generated by that experience.

2.2. Brand experience in the context of TV series

Given that omni-channel strategies enable a unique consumer experience (Öztürk and Okumuş 2018; Wang et al. 2018) and that TV series are increasingly managed under such strategies, it is important to identify how the viewer lives the series-brand experience.

In recent years, the marketing literature has highlighted the need to deliver unique and memorable brand experiences that facilitate stronger consumer–brand relationships (Khan and Fatma 2017). In this regard, increased competition and the dynamism of today's markets have prompted brands to increasingly turn to experiential marketing to incentivise customer engagement and achieve a stable competitive position (Yu et al. 2021).

Pine and Gilmore (1998) consider that the more senses an experience involves, the more effective and memorable it can be. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) established that brand experience focuses on the cognitive and emotional aspects of the consumption experience. In relation to the evaluation of different types of experiences, Schmitt (1999) suggested a multidimensional concept with five types of customer experiences that serve as the basis for a general experiential marketing analysis (Chen and Lin 2015): sensing, feeling, thinking, acting, and relating. One of the seminal works on this topic that has aroused achieved sustained interest among scholars is that proposed by Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009). These authors define and empirically verify brand experience as a multidimensional construct capable of capturing those 'subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments'. Experience can therefore be understood as the consumer's subjective and internal responses to each touch-point with the company (Gómez-Suárez and Veloso 2020), being a cumulative process based on all experiences related to a brand, both direct and indirect (Yu et al. 2021).

Experience is therefore a difficult phenomenon for competitors to imitate, presenting a high effect on consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and recommendation that can become a source of competitive advantage in the market (Ding and Tseng 2015; Pine and Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999).

2.3. WOM as a consequence of brand experience in the TV context

Westbrook (1987) defines WOM as 'all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers'. Some authors believe that this form of communication may be the oldest form of exchange of opinions about goods and services (Goyette et al. 2010). Harrison-Walker (2001) also highlights the informal nature of this type of person-to-person communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver about a brand, product, or service.

This means that WOM can have a positive, neutral, or negative impact on the company or product in question, given its influence on the purchasing behaviour of other consumers (Chen et al. 2014). While positive WOM increases the likelihood of purchase, negative WOM causes a detrimental effect associated with the spread of complaints (Xu and Chan 2010). Thus, a firm's profitability can be affected by the degree to which consumers engage in WOM with respect to the products or services it offers (Ansary and Hashim 2018).

Given that, through WOM, consumers communicate their brand experiences with other individuals in their environment, this communication mechanism can be considered an outcome of that experience (Khan and Fatma 2017). In this sense, when consumers experience negative emotions about the brand (e.g., disgust, embarrassment, or dissatisfaction), they are less likely to be loyal to it and are more likely to engage in negative WOM (Paramita et al. 2021). Conversely, consumers are more likely to share positive information and positive aspects of the brand when they are satisfied with their brand interaction (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998). Correspondingly, as Kähr et al. (2016) found, negative brand experience can lead to customer retaliation such as negative WOM.

The literature has also highlighted the importance of WOM in the TV context (Fossen and Schweidel 2017). In this regard, for decades, TV series have constituted one of the most talked-about TV-product categories in society (Romaniuk and Harnett 2017). Here, WOM can influence both current and future viewers, affecting the popularity and audience ratings of such products (Bae and Kim 2019), and may even influence the renewal or cancellation of TV series.

Some TV production companies develop mechanisms for viewers to share their experience with the product and thus disseminate information to other viewers (Vanattenhoven and Geerts 2016), thereby expanding omni-channelling. In this sense, Cadario (2015) considers that extensive WOM regarding TV programmes and series increases the level of information received by viewers, which facilitates greater confidence in these products. This phenomenon is a key factor for marketing, since it has the capacity to influence consumer behaviour, sales, and profitability (Fossen and Schweidel 2017).

Previous literature shows that, in the case of hedonic consumer products such as TV series (Oliver and Raney 2011), effective experiential marketing will develop brand experience and generate interactions between consumers, as is the case in other purely hedonic sectors such as that of luxury goods (Klein et al. 2016). The following research hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H1: TV-drama-series brand experience has a direct and positive effect on WOM.

Assuming that customers choose certain brands over others because of experiential benefits (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010), it is conceivable that the different types of content in TV series will also result in different responses – in WOM-generation, viewing choices, or series ratings, for instance.

2.4. Frequent content in current TV series

Narrative elements such as sex and violence are routinely incorporated in the audio-visual industry as a mechanism to attract a wider audience, on the premise that such content 'sells' (Bushman 2005). Some authors claim that this type of content attracts younger viewers and that, in addition, viewers tend to pay more attention to this type of programme than to those that do not present sex or violence (Bushman 2005). These elements are also included in advertising and in film and TV-series commercials to attract interest in the advertised product (Oliver et al. 2007), as they heighten anticipation and serve as an attraction mechanism (Xie and Lee 2008).

Several studies have analysed the amount of sexual content on TV. Fisher et al. (2004) found that 82% of the TV programmes they analysed on US TV contained some type of sexual content, rising to 87% in the drama genre. Kunkel et al. (2007) estimated that, in the early 2000s, 64% of TV programmes on TV networks and cable channels contained some type of sexual content, reaching 71% in the case of drama TV series. More recently, a statistic released in 2019 by Morning Consult in conjunction with *The Hollywood Reporter* identified that 70% of adults surveyed considered sex to be more common on TV than five years earlier. However, the study also found that only 24% of respondents were significantly troubled by the amount of sex on TV versus 50% who presented relatively little concern or none at all (Morning Consult and The Hollywood Reporter 2019).

Violence also appears frequently in the media (Busching, Allen, and Anderson 2016), being commonly presented in audio-visual products broadcast daily on TV (Fernández et al. 2013). Analysis of the overall increase in prime-time violence in recent years (Hetsroni 2010) has also identified relative increases of 45% at 8 p.m., 92% at 9 p.m., and 167% at 10 p.m. (Kirsh 2011). Furthermore, Coyne, Robinson, and Nelson (2010) found there to be 42.5 aggressive acts per hour, on average, in the programmes with the highest ratings. Regarding violence, the aforementioned 2019 report by Morning Consult and *The Hollywood Reporter* shows that 41% of respondents had seen several instances of gun violence on TV, highlighting that 32% of respondents are bothered by violence on TV.

Different TV production companies have concluded that the choice of appropriate programming is an essential factor in attracting viewers and that viewers' attitudes are vital for building brand image (McDowell and Sutherland 2000). Therefore, programming must take into account the characteristic attributes of each product – that is, those characteristics that describe and shape the product and vary according to its type (Keller 1993). Consequently, given that TV series are experiential goods whose attributes are difficult to evaluate prior to consumption or viewing, the potential viewer depends to some degree on the experiences and evaluations of other people (Chiu et al. 2019).

2.4. The moderating role of individualism/collectivism and gender in the relationship between brand experience and WOM

Culture is an essential concept in explaining consumer behaviour (Khan and Fatma 2021). Hofstede (1980) defines culture as the collective mental programming that differentiates one group from another. Hofstede et al. (2010) propose that national culture is composed of six dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint; and the effect of these dimensions on consumer behaviour has been extensively studied in marketing (Yu, Liu, and Lee 2019). For this study, we focus on the individualism/collectivism dimension, given the interpersonal nature of the outcome variable we are concerned with: WOM.

The individualism/collectivism dimension (Hofstede 1980, 2011) refers to the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. Thus, the fundamental difference between the two types of societies is the degree of interdependence between people (Khan and Fatma 2021). In individualistic societies, each person is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family, while, in collectivistic societies, there is a broader and stronger integration into a group that defends its members in exchange for group loyalty (Hofstede 2011). In this regard, more individualistic societies focus on their personal interests, in contrast to collectivist societies that put group interests before individual concerns (Yoon and Park 2018). In the present study, we apply an *individual* perspective to this cultural dimension, on the premise that individuals will differ in their cultural outlook even if they share the same nationality (Schwartz 2014).

Earlier research has confirmed that WOM can be affected by a person's cultural values (e.g., Lam, Lee, and Mizerski 2009). Thus, some authors consider that more collectivistic individuals tend to seek and share information and opinions with others around them to a greater degree than more individualistic individuals (Kim, Wen, and Doh 2009; Yu, Liu, and Lee 2019). This may be because individualists consider themselves more distant from others and value their own perceptions more highly than collectivists (Hwang and Seo 2016), which may influence their brand experience.

On the other hand, in collectivistic cultures, there tends to be more interaction between people. Consequently, there is greater interpersonal communication that leads to WOM about products and brands, especially in the case of negative experiences, where they will convey their opinions to the members of the group (Goodrich and de Mooij 2013).

Ultimately, since TV series are experiential products whose attributes are difficult to evaluate prior to viewing, other people's experiences and evaluations facilitate product choice (Chiu et al. 2019). Therefore, brand experiences can affect customer behaviour (Köhler and Esch 2018), with the emotions experienced by the individual being the most important driver of WOM (Lovett, Peres, and Shachar 2013).

Thus, the influence of viewers' and society's level of individualism/collectivism on the relationship between brand experience and WOM will be of interest to managers and decision-makers in the audio-visual industry, as WOM can affect the viewer's choice of which TV series to watch (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: The effect of TV-drama-series brand experience on WOM will be greater among less individualistic TV viewers than among more individualistic viewers.
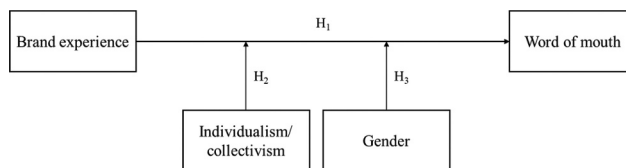
Figure 1. Proposed research model.

Marketing research has also studied the influence of gender, applying this demographic characteristic as a moderating variable of consumer behaviour and finding significant differences according to gender in different contexts, such as the shopping experience (Khan and Rahman 2016; Mihic and Milakovic 2017). Other studies have analysed the moderating role of gender in: the intention to use different technologies in a shop and purchase intention in an omni-channel context (Mosquera et al. 2018); the role of recommendations in sports spectatorship (Asada and Ko 2019); and tourists' perceptions of the credibility and quality of information from social networks (Dedeoglu 2019).

In relation to WOM, several studies analyse the role of gender. Kempf and Palan (2006) found that women trust information from WOM more than men. Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004) found that men tend not to be significantly influenced by WOM even if it is from a close source. Furthermore, these authors also concluded that, in the context of online shopping, WOM is more effective in reducing perceived risk for women than for men. Li and Wang (2018) also found that women are more likely to generate WOM than men, due to differences in the social motivations of the two genders. Bae and Lee (2011) found that women have a higher purchase intention than men when reading positive product reviews, as women are more willing to accept other people's opinions (Asada and Ko 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: TV-drama series brand experience will have a greater effect on the generation of WOM for women than for men.

Figure 1 shows the proposed research model.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data collection

For the selection of the TV series to be used in this research, we followed the criteria for classifying TV series according to sexual and violent content proposed by Bushman (2005). To this end, a search was carried out for TV series in the drama genre, as well as the different subgenres (action, crime, science fiction, fantasy, historical, medical, and teen), on the film and TV ratings websites IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes. We pre-selected five TV series in each subgenre, produced and broadcast in the US since 2010, with a rating of more than 8, averaged across the two websites (see Table 1). Subsequently, 200 user reviews were downloaded from the IMDb website for each pre-selected series, based on downloading (for each year of broadcast) a number of comments proportional to the number of seasons broadcast and sorted by IMDb's 'helpfulness' criterion. Therefore, for a TV series with two seasons broadcast over two

years, 100 reviews were downloaded for each year. In this way, we obtained comments with different ratings (from 1 to 10-star ratings) for each season broadcast, covering the entire broadcast period and capturing the reviews for the different seasons broadcast. These reviews served our research purposes as e-WOM between audience members (Cadario 2015) that helped reduce uncertainty for potential viewers in choosing which TV drama series to watch (Niraj and Singh 2015).

We analysed the reviews using NVivo11 software to examine the frequency of words related to sexual and violent content. Hence, we took into consideration words such as 'torture', 'murder', 'gore', 'nudity', 'pornographic', and so on, capturing viewers' perceptions and opinions regarding this type of content. We then converted all the frequencies obtained for related terms to base 100 in order to create a positioning map of the TV series according to different degrees of violent (high vs. low) and sexual (high vs. low) content. Finally, we focused our attention on the two TV series considered by the audience to have the highest level of sexual and violent content ('Outlander' and 'Game of Thrones') vs. the lowest ('Stranger Things' and 'Better Call Saul'). Based on this selection of TV series characterised by two different levels of such content, we sought to understand its effect on the proposed research model.

To fulfil the proposed research objectives and test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was carried out using a structured online questionnaire (Qualtrics platform) distributed to TV-series viewers in the US. More specifically, we targeted two sub-samples: one for series with a high level of sexual and violent content, and one for a low level. For this purpose, we contracted the services of Dynata, one of the world's leading survey panel providers. Dynata's consumer and professional panels cover individual profiles of more than 60 million people worldwide and the company is known for its reliable and highly-targeted data. Through this company, between November and December 2020, we distributed the online questionnaire to US viewers who had watched the selected TV series. The questionnaire started with a brief synopsis of the series in question, accompanied by its poster-image, together with a filter question to check that the respondent had watched it. Subsequently, eight photographs of characters from TV series with similar aesthetics were shown, and respondents had to correctly select the four that corresponded to the series in question. Hence, those who did not get at least three of the four characters correct were excluded from the study. As characters from different seasons were included, this enabled us to identify those respondents who had watched the series throughout its entire broadcast and who had sufficient knowledge of it. Following this filtering process and the elimination of invalid questionnaires, we obtained a final sample comprising 287 responses for the sub-sample relating to TV series with a high level of sexual and violent content and 273 responses for TV series with a low level. Table 2 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, which is fairly representative of the US population according to the data provided by Dynata.

3.2. Measures

All measurements were made on 7-point Likert scales (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree). A 12-item scale adapted from Brakus et al. (2009) was used to measure brand experience. To measure WOM, we used an adapted version of the scale proposed by Stojanovic, Andreu, and

Table 1. Pre-selected TV series.

Genre	TV Series	Average Viewer Rating	Genre	TV Series	Average Viewer Rating
Action	Game of Thrones	9	Science Fiction	The Expanse	9.05
	Vikings	8.95		Game of Thrones	9
	The Last Kingdom	8.9		Stranger Things	8.95
	Daredevil	8.9		Travelers	8.95
	Altered Carbon	8.55		Outlander	8.7
Crime	Better Call Saul	9.15	Fantasy	Game of Thrones	9
	Fargo	9.1		Stranger Things	8.95
	Mindhunter	9.05		Daredevil	8.9
	Mr Robot	8.9		Outlander	8.7
	The Rookie	8.85		Sense8	8.7
Historical	Vikings	8.95	Teen Drama	Stranger Things	8.95
	The Last Kingdom	8.9		Sex Education	8.9
	The Crown	8.85		Euphoria	8.35
	Outlander	8.7		Legacies	8.15
Medical	New Amsterdam	8.15			
	The Good Doctor	8.05			

Note: Some TV series appear in several subgenres given the process of genre-hybridisation (Marta-Lazo and Abadía 2018). In the case of the subgenres 'Historical', 'Teen Drama' and 'Medical', the number of preselected TV series is lower due to the absence of others that meet the established criteria or because they have an insufficient number of reviews.

Curras-Pérez (2018), which, in turn, was based on the original scale of Kim and Ko (2012). Finally, to measure the individualism/collectivism cultural dimension, we used the CVSCALE proposed by Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz (2011) (see Table 3).

4. Results

4.1. Psychometric properties of the scales

Before testing the hypotheses, we analysed the psychometric properties of the scales, based on estimating a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL software. Given that the moderation analysis used by PROCESS software only allows the inclusion of an average variable as an independent variable, brand experience was used as a unidimensional measure, as recommended by Khan and Fatma (2017). The indicators obtained show significant loadings and individual reliability above the recommended threshold (Del Barrio and Luque 2012), except for three items related to brand experience ('BREX') – namely, BREX7, BREX8, and BREX11 – which were eliminated. The variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CF) indicators also presented values above the recommended thresholds, and the general goodness-of-fit indicators presented values within the ranges recommended by the literature (see Tables 3 and 4).

Once the psychometric properties of the scales had been tested, as a preliminary step toward the analysis using PROCESS software (Hayes 2018), a single average variable was created for each scale-item construct.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Two moderated regression models were proposed that sought to analyse the moderating effect of brand experience on WOM (i) for TV series with a low level of sexual and violent content and (ii) for TV series with a high level of sexual and violent content. In both

Table 2. Sample description.

Variable	Category	N (%) High content sex and violence	N (%) Low content sex and violence
Gender	Male	134 (46.7%)	125 (45.8%)
	Female	153 (53.3%)	148 (54.2%)
Age	18–24	19 (6.6%)	29 (10.6%)
	25-34	44 (15.3%)	47 (21.2%)
	35–44	68 (23.7%)	89 (32.6%)
	45-54	47 (16.4%)	37 (13.6%)
	55–64	109 (38%)	60 (22%)
Annual Income	$25,000 or less	29 (10.1%)	46 (16.8%)
	$25,001 – $50,000	59 (20.6%)	65 (23.8%)
	$50,001 – $75,000	57 (19.9%)	55 (20.1%)
	$75,001 – $100,000	47 (16.4%)	42 (15.4%)
	$100,001 – $150,000	52 (18.1%)	41 (15%)
	$150,001 – $200,000	36 (12.5%)	17 (6.2%)
	$200,001 – $250,000	4 (1.4%)	3 (1.1%)
	$250,001 or more	3 (1%)	4(1.5%)

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Construct (adapted from)	Items	Stand. Coeff.	t-value	R^2	CR	AVE
Brand experience (Brakus et al. 2009)	BREX1: (TV series' name) makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses	0.87	*	0.76	0.95	0.70
	BREX2: I find (TV series' name) interesting in a sensory way	0.91	24.15	0.82		
	BREX3: (TV series' name) appeals to my senses	0.90	31.79	0.82		
	BREX4: (TV series' name) induces feelings and sentiments	0.88	29.77	0.77		
	BREX5: I have strong emotions for (TV series' name)	0.88	27.72	0.78		
	BREX6: (TV series' name) is an emotional TV series	0.82	24.75	0.68		
	BREX9: (TV series' name) is action-oriented	0.71	17.89	0.50		
	BREX10: I engage a lot of thinking when I encounter this TV series	0.78	20.20	0.60		
	BREX12: (TV series' name) stimulates my curiosity and problem solving	0.75	21.69	0.56		
Word of Mouth (Kim and Ko 2012; Stojanovic, Andreu, and Curras-Perez 2018)	WOM1: I am going to speak positively about (TV series' name).	0.93	*	0.86	0.95	0.86
	WOM2: If I was asked, I would recommend (TV series' name).	0.94	39.52	0.88		
	WOM3: I would recommend (TV series' name) to my friends and family.	0.92	38.97	0.84		
Individualism/ Collectivism (Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz 2011)	IND1: Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group	0.77	*	0.60	0.92	0.62
	IND2: Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties	0.72	16.48	0.51		
	IND3: Group welfare is more important than individual success	0.86	22.78	0.74		
	IND4: Group success is more important than individual success	0.86	22.66	0.75		
	IND5: Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group	0.84	33.82	0.70		
	IND6: Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer	0.81	20.05	0.66		

SB-chi squared (d.f.): 544.53 (132); RMSEA: 0.075; NFI: 0.98; CFI: 0.98; IFI: 0.98

models, brand experience was taken to be an independent variable (X), and WOM an independent variable (Y). As moderating variables, 'individualism vs. collectivism' was a metric variable constructed as an indicator from the average of the scale-items, and

'gender' was a nominative variable (1 being male, and 2 female). The software used to estimate the models was PROCESS 3.4 using OLS regression and bootstrap estimation (10,000 samples) (Hayes 2018).

The results in Tables 5 and 6 show the significant effect of brand experience (X) on WOM (Y), both in model 1 (M1) ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience} \to \text{WOM\_M1}}$: 1.12; $p < 0.05$) and in model 2 (M2) ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience} \to \text{WOM\_M2}}$: 1.19; $p < 0.05$). These results enable us to confirm H1 in both cases, which proposed that TV-drama-series brand experience has a direct and positive effect on WOM – that is, the more highly-rated the experience, the more WOM is generated. This is in line with the findings of Khan and Fatma (2017), who consider WOM to be an outcome of consumer experience.

Turning to the analysis of the interaction effects of individualism/collectivism on this relationship, the present results indicate that this variable does *not* moderate the relationship between brand experience and WOM in the case of TV series with a high level of sexual and violent content ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience}}$ X $\beta_{\text{Individualism vs. collectivism} \to \text{WOM}}$: -0.03 $p > 0.05$), while it does in the case of a low level of sexual and violent content ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience}}$ X $\beta_{\text{Individualism vs. collectivism} \to \text{WOM}}$: -0.07 $p > 0.05$). H2 is therefore confirmed in model 2 but not in model 1. Similarly, the results indicate that the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between brand experience and WOM is significant in the case of TV series with a low level of sexual and violent content ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience}}$ X $_{\text{Gender} \to \text{WOM}}$: 0.22 $p > 0.05$), but not in the case of a high level of such content ($\beta_{\text{Brand experience}}$ X $_{\text{Gender} \to \text{WOM}}$: -0.03 $p > 0.05$). H3 is thus confirmed for M2 but not for M1. These results show the influence of the consumer's national culture and gender on WOM-generation for M2 (see figure 2), as women and more collectivistic subjects tend to participate to a greater degree in WOM than men and more individualistic subjects (Asada and Ko 2019; Goodrich and de Mooij 2013; Kim et al. 2009; Li and Wang 2018; Yu, Liu, and Lee 2019).

The double interaction effect detected in the model of TV-drama series with a low level of sexual and violent content means that, the more highly-rated the brand experience, the more WOM is generated, mainly among those who present a low level of individualism, and especially among women. That is, less WOM will be generated in the case of a weaker brand experience, especially among female audiences with low individualism.

Derived from these significant interactions, we can also present the conditional direct effects of the independent variable (brand experience) on the dependent variable (WOM), for each level of the moderator (individualism vs. collectivism; gender) (Table 7). The results indicate that, for TV series with a low level of sexual and violent content, the effect of brand experience on WOM is significant for both genders, and for both levels of individualism. However, the effect is substantially greater among women, and especially in the case of women with a low level of individualism.

Table 4. Discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

	BREX	WOM	IND
BREX	**0.84**		
WOM	0.83	**0.93**	
IND	0.28	0.26	**0.79**

Table 5. HIGH Model. Moderation analysis: WOM.

| Effect	Coeff.	Standard Error	p-value	t-value	CI 95%
Constant	−0.49	0.97	0.61	−0.50	−2.41 — 1.42
Brand experience (X)	1.12	0.16	0.00	6.81	0.802 — 1.45
Individualism vs. collectivism (W)	0.22	0.16	0.16	1.38	−0.09 — 0.54
Gender (Z)	0.11	0.43	0.79	0.25	−0.73 — 0.95
X*W	−0.03	0.02	0.17	−1.34	−0.08 — 0.01
W*X	−0.03	0.07	0.62	−0.48	−0.18 — 0.11
Summary of the model: R2:0.6984; F:130.12; df1:5.00; df2:281; p-value: 0.00					

$***p < 0.01$; $**p < 0.05$; $*p < 0.10$; 95% CI does not contain 0.

Table 6. LOW Model. Moderation analysis: WOM.

Effect	Coeff.	Standard Error	p-value	t-value	CI 95%
Constant	1.72	1.06	0.10	1.62	0.36 — 3.82
Brand experience (X)	0.73	0.19	0.00	3.78	0.35 — 1.11
Individualism vs. collectivism (W)	0.47	0.17	0.00	2.73	0.13 — 0.82
Gender (Z)	−1.35	0.51	0.00	−2.64	−2.36 --- 0.34
X*W	−0.07	0.03	0.01	−2.44	−0.13 --- 0.01
X*Z	0.22	0.09	0.01	2.49	0.04 — 0.40
Summary of the model: R2:0.5819; F:74.31; df1:5.00; df2:267; p-value: 0.00					

$***p < 0.01$; $**p < 0.05$; $*p < 0.10$; 95% CI does not contain 0.
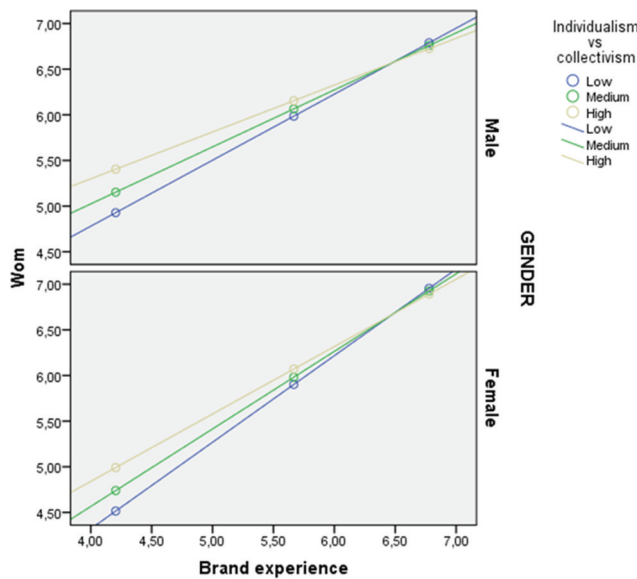
Figure 2. Interaction effect of individualism vs. collectivism and gender on the relationship between brand experience and WOM in the case of TV series with low sexual and violent content.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Theoretical implications

The main conclusion of this study is that the viewer's experience of the brand from a sensory and emotional point of view influences the degree to which they generate comments and recommendations about the TV series in question, and that this influence

Table 7. Conditional direct effects.

Conditional direct effects – Low				
Individualism vs. collectivism	Gender	Effect	Standard Error	CI 95%
Low	Male	0.72**	0.07	0.5706 — 0.8755
	Female	0.94**	0.06	0.8225 — 1.0736
Moderate	Male	0.62**	0.07	0.4758 — 0.7729
	Female	0.84**	0.05	0.7350 — 0.9637
High	Male	0.51**	0.09	0.3240 — 0.7025
	Female	0.73**	0.08	0.5798 — 0.8968

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$; 95% CI does not contain 0.*

occurs regardless of whether the series contains a high or low level of sexual and violent content. Consequently, we concur with Khan and Fatma (2017) in considering WOM to be a result of the viewer's experience, given that, for both types of content, viewers communicated their experience of the TV product to other individuals in their environment. This fact is of interest given that the transmission of such experiences through the generation of WOM has the ability to influence the behaviour and evaluation of other viewers, both present and future (Bae and Kim 2019).

In the case of TV drama series with a high level of sexual and violent content, men and women generate WOM to the same degree based on their experience of the brand; and both viewers with low levels of individualism and those with high levels of individualism generate comments and recommendations to a similar degree – contrary to H2 and H3 for this model. From this conclusion, it follows that the impact of this content does not distinguish between cultural values or gender and influences viewers equally, generating feelings that lead them to communicate their positive opinion and recommend the TV series. In this case, managers of production companies and/or platforms are therefore advised to seek to offer controversial content, which ensures the global generation of WOM regardless of gender or cultural factors, meaning that the opportunities for brand–viewer contact are multiplied.

In the case of TV drama series with a low level of sexual and violent content, the results show that less individualistic viewers generate comments and recommendations to a greater extent when they experience feelings and emotions in relation to the brand. This makes sense, since collectivistic subjects have a 'group' sensibility that naturally leads them to share their opinions and to seek approval, reaffirmation, and participation (Kim et al. 2009; Yu, Liu, and Lee 2019). This is important because, as collectivistic viewers will tend to convey and converse more about their experiences of the TV series they watch, they have the power to influence other viewers in their viewing choices, given the experiential nature of this product (Chiu et al. 2019; Godes and Mayzlin 2004). Moreover, women were found to generate markedly more WOM, which is in line with the findings of the WOM literature more generally (Asada and Ko 2019; Li and Wang 2018). Consequently, understanding how WOM is generated is of vital importance for the success of new TV series in their initial stages. Its ability to influence audiences can lead to a significant increase in audience awareness and positive attitudes – a phenomenon that arose in the case of 'The Big Bang Theory' (Cadario 2015), for example, and may be applicable to other TV series.

5.2. Managerial implications

Derived from the above, if the productions do not contain controversial elements, the marketing and communication managers of production companies and/or platforms should take into account the fact that it will be less individualistic women (and more collectivistic viewers, in general) who will have the most proactive attitude toward publishing reviews of the drama series, this group being the most likely to express positive comments and recommendations. In this case, in terms of achieving WOM for TV series with a low level of sexual and violent content, managers are advised to develop promotional campaigns substantially focused on a female audience and/or a collectivist audience. In addition, they should also promote Social Television and experiences related to TV series via apps featuring exclusive complementary material or even immersive experiences or exhibitions related to the series, as exemplified by 'Game of Thrones' or 'The Walking Dead'. This approach will create a more satisfactory experience for this type of audience that will encourage the generation of WOM.

Although individualism/collectivism was measured in this study from the individual point of view (Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz 2011), this result could well be extrapolated to national terms or the ecological perspective proposed by Hofstede (1980), both of which are more affordable in terms of broadcasting a product such as TV drama series, given its international nature. Hofstede's 'Compare Countries' tool (hofstede-insights.com) provides the scores for the aforementioned six dimensions given by this researcher to the countries in which he has developed his research, and shows which societies are characterised by high collectivism vs. individualism. If we link this data with the present research findings, TV series with a low level of sexual and violent content viewed by female audiences in China or Mexico (characterised as collectivist societies) could achieve relatively large WOM shares, compared to female audiences in countries such as the United Kingdom or Australia, which are characterised as having a high level of individualism, as viewers there do not feel a strong need to share their opinions. Consequently, production companies and broadcasters will have to adapt their communication campaigns and the experiences related to TV series that they provide for each country where they are broadcast, in order to benefit from such a moderating effect on WOM generation.

Findings from previous technical studies support some of the conclusions of this research: for example, according to the We Are Social study (2021), the use of social media to search for brands or engage with products is particularly high in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Colombia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Argentina, and Turkey. Our research shows that these countries have a low level of individualism as a common denominator, which, in addition to corroborating our findings, also indicates that audiences in these countries will be more likely to develop brand experiences and therefore comment on, or recommend, TV series. Furthermore, the Philippines registers the highest average time spent on social media, while Spain, China, and India are below average. It has also been found that women tend to use social networks to a greater extent than men (Pew Research Center 2021). This trend is reflected in the results of the present study for the specific case of TV-drama-series brand experiences.

While, to stimulate comments and recommendations among the most receptive audiences, it is essential to create high-quality series scripts, plots, visual concepts, and promotional campaigns, this is not enough to fend off globalised market competition. All of these elements must also be strategically adapted to all the different channels through which TV series are distributed. That is, to design effective omni-channel strategies and to make the right functional decisions about which media to make available to the viewer, TV production companies and their marketing teams need to consider the uses those viewers make of Social Television: for civic–informative purposes; identity-building or social awareness; emotional purposes; or play or recreational uses (Selva 2015). Civic or informative use involves viewers' interactions that have only a symbolic meaning (such as tweeting that they are watching a particular TV series, or posting about a specific event that has happened in an episode), while emotional use is concerned with the need to satisfy expressive needs such as frustration and indignation. In the context of the present research, people from less individualistic cultures are more likely to generate WOM but also to use communications for emotional purposes and therefore to express their needs and feelings.

Finally, the general recommendation for TV production companies and other agents related to the TV drama-series industry is to endeavour to develop different distribution and communication channels, given that the advantage of offering an omni-channel experience is that it promotes a loyal and lasting relationship between the viewer and the series, which generates greater value for the customer in experiential terms. A well-structured omni-channel strategy should consider the design of the distribution channel of the TV series and the choice of in-house, paid, or earned communication channels, in order to reach the greatest number of touch-points with the viewer and optimise their experience. It should be noted that a large part of earned media will come from WOM and e-WOM, as these are not controlled by the company. A significant degree of WOM will also be generated by series-specific media such as series websites, apps, or social networks. The advantages of the omni-channel strategy in the TV-series sector will shape a brand experience capable of stimulating positive feedback and recommendation.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Finally, turning to the limitations of this study, even though the US does account for a large proportion of TV production, we focused solely on TV drama-series in the US context. Therefore, to overcome this limitation, future research could be carried out on other TV genres and in other geographical contexts in order to test whether the results of this study can be extrapolated to genres such as comedy or reality shows in different countries and cultures.

The other limitation derives from the fact that we selected and downloaded a sample of 200 reviews from IMDb, to obtain an equivalent number of comments for each TV series, leading inevitably to a partial viewing of such viewer-generated comments. Consequently, future research could carry out a complete analysis of all reviews hosted on IMDb. Likewise, our study was limited to the analysis of two series per content level, so it would be valuable for future studies to include a greater number of series for each level.

It would also be interesting to include other socio-demographic aspects in future analyses, such as moderating variables including age or income level, to measure their effect on the generation of WOM based on the experience of the viewer.

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