Investigating the antecedents of African fast food customers' loyalty: a self-congruity perspective

Rania A.M. Shamah – Faculty of Commerce, Suez University, Cairo. rania.shamah@gmail.com

Michela C. Mason – Department of Economics and Statistics, University of Udine. Via Tomadini 30/A – 33100 Udine (Italy). michela.mason@uniud.it

Andrea Moretti – Department of Economics and Statistics, University of Udine. Via Tomadini 30/A – 33100 Udine (Italy). andrea.moretti@uniud.it

Francesco Raggiotto (Corresponding Author) – Department of Economics and Statistics, University of Udine. Via Tomadini 30/A – 33100 Udine (Italy). francesco.raggiotto@uniud.it

Investigating the antecedents of African fast food customers' loyalty: a self-congruity perspective

1. Introduction

This paper devotes its efforts to enrich fast-food restaurant loyalty literature by examining the impact of self-congruity on customer loyalty. Responding to the call for a more comprehensive discussion on the link between self-congruity and loyalty (e.g., Aguirre-Rodriguez et al, 2012), the paper introduces some mediators related to customer perceptions of some key fast-food restaurant cues: environment, price, product, service. These mediators are considered as key determinants of customer perceptions in the specific service setting (e.g., Soriano, 2002; Hyun, 2010).

Self-congruity and loyalty are two key marketing concepts, believed to explain a great part of consumption preferences and choices. The two constructs have received a great deal of attention from academics.

Loyalty represents a key goal for marketers. The ability of a firm to generate loyalty allows the creation of a stable customer pool for brands, products, and services of a company (e.g., Oliver, 1999). In addition to the highly positive consequences in terms of sales and revenues, loyalty generates other relevant outcomes, such as: repeated purchases, positive word of mouth, willingness of customers to pay higher prices (e.g., Zeithaml et al, 1996). Retaining existing customers is less expensive than looking for an entirely new customer base (Tepeci, 1999).

Marketing research has recognized since a long time the prominent role of symbolic meanings in customer behavior. With respect to symbolic consumption, self-congruity represents a key topic in marketing research, allowing to decipher and interpret different facets of customer behavior (Hosany and Martin, 2012). Self-congruity refers to the customer perceived match between his/her own self-image and the perceived image of a certain

2

product, brand, or service (e.g., Sirgy, 1986; Hosany and Martin, 2012). Self-congruity theory has been applied to a variety of service contexts (e.g., Back, 2005; Ekinci et al, 2008; Paharia et al, 2011; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014; Line and Hanks, 2016) Several studies have suggested a significant, influencing role of self-congruity in determining loyalty (e.g., Sirgy et al, 1997; Jamal and Goode, 2001; Kressmann et al, 2006; Kang et al, 2012). However, the relationship between self-congruity and loyalty appears quite under investigated. The distance between self-image and a product/brand/service image might appear particularly problematic for those non context-specific product categories (e.g., fast-food in the small African urban areas; vodka in Italy), and global brands (e.g., Coke in Africa and China). The fast food sector presents interesting characteristics from this point of view: it is in fact dominated by global brands that have developed strong localization processes (e.g., Watson, 1998).

It appears worth to explore the fast-food sector, in countries that highly differ from fast food companies' country of origin, to verify the relationship between self-congruity and loyalty. The fast-food industry presents at least three major features that make it valuable in terms of the discussion presented above. They are: a) adaptation of global brands to local contexts; b) localization processes already in place (e.g., Watson, 1998) and c) researches about the sector already exist, but none of them focused on the relationship between self-congruity and loyalty.

Fast food industry in African markets fit the three research agenda points above. Fast food is a multi-billion- dollar industry with undoubtful influences on dietary habits of people. Africa in particular has become a highly attractive market in recent years due to the growth of its economy (EPRS, 2016). African markets present some relevant peculiarities in terms of consumer behavior, worth to be examined. For example, in Africa, -like in some other countries-, individuals perceive that having the means to eat at restaurants like McDonald's is

3

a sign of prosperity and higher social status (Park, 2004; Shi et al., 2005). In addition, in many countries, it is considered "hip" among younger people to consume food from U.S.-native restaurant chains (Park, 2004). More research is needed to better understand cross-cultural differences in perceptions of U.S. restaurant chain food consumption in African countries, allowing marketers to properly exploit the great business opportunities offered by these developing markets. More specifically, in the international food service firms (i.e., fast food global companies), different authors (Kara et al 1996, Lee and Ulgado 1997) pointed out the need to understand customer perceptions related to service quality in different local contexts, as food consumption entails strong significance in terms of cultural and ethnic identification (Keillor and Fields, 1996). Food consumption behaviors are highly complex and result from the interaction of multiple influences across different context.

In Africa, food consumer behavior is likely to present unique features due to the fact that, it has (is being) reshaped by strong global-local interactions, occurring as a result of the increasing globalization of local markets (e.g., Wilhelmina et al, 2010; Rischke et al, 2015), which have deep implications in terms of individual identity (i.e. self congruity) and cultural alterations (e.g., Popkin, 2004; Mergenthaler et al, 2009; Reardon and Timmer, 2012; Rischke et al, 2015) Moreover, it is worth to note that, in African markets like in other many low- and middle-income countries, fast food is becoming increasingly relevant in food consumption choices, as part of the globalization process that has triggered rapid changes in local diet and food habits (e.g., Popkin, 2004; Mergenthaler et al, 2009; Reardon and Timmer, 2012; Rischke et al, 2015). Global fast food operators are aware of the need to properly adapt their offerings to the religious and cultural prescriptions imposed by local contexts (e.g., the need to guarantee that food respects the halal rules for Muslim North Africans). McDonald's is an emblematic example in this sense: it provides -more or less-

standardized menus in terms of basic structure (e.g., burger, fries, soft drinks); customizations are introduced for each country, in order to account for local specificities (Vignali, 2001).

Marketing and consumer research has analyzed the efforts of fast-food chains, and its consumer behavior implications in several emerging and developing countries (e.g., Watson, 1998; Park, 2004; Baek et al, 2006; Goyal and Singh, 2007; Srivastava, 2015); however, little attention, so far, has been devoted to the African continent, except for a -relative- attention dedicated to South Africa (e.g. Maumbe, 2012). The scarce attention devoted to the fast-food consumption in Africa reflects a general tendency of marketing research, which has, so far, devoted very few contributions to the study of African contexts (Lages et al, 2015).

However, as suggested by several authors (e.g., Peng et al, 2008; Rivera-Santos et al, 2015; Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2016), there is a need to fill the gap regarding management and marketing research for African contexts: this need urges both scholars (i.e., examining these context-specific settings to advance marketing/consumer behavior studies), and market practitioners. Empirical investigations with African primary data allows to overcome a limiting perspective based on the mere transferring of established theories and theoretical frameworks developed in Western cultural settings to developing countries like Africa, ignoring de facto country-specific peculiarities (e.g., Steenkamp and Burgess, 2002; Keller and Moorthi, 2003).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Self-congruity

Customers buy products, brands, and services basing not just on functional needs or attributes, but also because products carry a specific, symbolic meaning (e.g., Lee and Hyman, 2008). Customers choose products, brands and services, that are perceived to be in line with the self-image they held of themselves (Sirgy, 1986). Broadly speaking, products,

brands, and services are vehicles of self-expression (Aaker, 1999). Self-image congruity is referred to as the cognitive match between a customer self-concept, and a product, service, or brand image (e.g., Sirgy et al, 1997; Sirgy and Su, 2000). Customers develop their perceptions basing on the stereotypical image of a typical user of a specific product, brand or service (Sirgy, 1986).

Self-concept theory is deeply grounded in social psychology, that primarily suggests how customers' personalities can be derived from the products, brands, and services they select (e.g., Ross, 1971). It is believed that, perceptions that individuals have of themselves (i.e., self-perceptions) influence customer behavior in terms of products, brands, and services people choose, in the same way in which such perceptions influence how people choose friends (e.g., De Chernatony, 2010).

Research has introduced multiple dimensions of self-concept (e.g., Sirgy et al, 2000). In general, marketing and consumer research have identified four different dimensions of self-concept: a) actual self-concept (i.e., how customers see themselves); b) ideal-self-concept (i.e., how customers would like to see themselves); c) social self-concept (i.e., how customers think others see them); d) ideal social self-concept (i.e., how customers would like to be perceived by other people, Sirgy, 1982). Self-concept dimensions mostly explored by research appear to be the individual actual and ideal dimensions (e.g., Abel et al, 2013). Following this major research stream, in this paper self-congruity only concerns the actual and the ideal dimension (e.g., Hosany and Martin, 2012). As noted by Ekinci et al (2003), focusing principally on ideal and actual self-image (both belonging to the *personal* dimension of self-image) can be equally relevant, given that it is believed that the social dimensions of self-image (i.e., social self) are strongly correlated with the actual and ideal self-image dimensions (i.e., personal dimensions, Ekinci et al, 2003). Much of the research on customer self-congruity has focused on customers' pre-purchase perceptions and decisions (Hosany

and Martin, 2012). Conversely, this paper joins the more recent debate on self-congruity research regarding post-consumption behavior, investigating the impact on self-congruity perceptions on key customer outcomes such as satisfaction (e.g., Ekinci et al, 2008), and loyalty (e.g., He and Mukherjee, 2007).

2.2 Key fast-food cues

Theoretical and empirical evidence affirms that customer choices tend to be strongly driven by tangible and intangible attributes of service contexts. For example, several authors (e.g., Bitner, 1992; Baker et al, 2002) have emphasized the prominent role of physical design, and, more in general, of ambient/atmospheric cues in influencing shoppers' behavior. Sensorial and psychological stimulation also comes from the interaction with other people in a service setting, especially with respect to the service personnel (e.g., Turley and Milliman, 2000). An important attribute of service settings in the restaurant sector is physical environment. The importance of environment in shaping customer decisions has been recognized since a long time in marketing literature. Accordingly, environment has been identified as a factor exerting a relevant influence on customer perceptions and behavior in the context of restaurants (e.g., Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ryu et al, 2012). Service provided by employees represents another key component in shaping restaurant customer perceptions (Soriano, 2002; Chow et al, 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Ryu et al, 2012). This crucial role of employee interactions is demonstrated by the fact that, some studies even approximate service quality measurements in restaurants, by referring only to service provided by employees (e.g., Ha and Jang, 2010).

Product perceptions represent another relevant factor regarding customer perceptions and patronage decisions in restaurant settings, where food quality represents the major factor in

determining loyalty-related customer behavior (e.g., Clark and Wood, 1999; Ha and Jang, 2010).

Another relevant determinant of customer behavior in retail contexts is price. Price is commonly divided into two components: monetary costs and non-monetary costs. Both are considered relevant in a retail context. Previous studies found that customers spending is determined by two resources: a time budget and a money budget. (Linder, 1970; Schary, 1971). In the specific context of the fast-food industry, low prices and fast delivery times represent some key attributes of the offering (Reich et al, 2006). Mason et al (2016) pointed out the impact of price on customer decision-making process, in the fast-food context. Hence, the key fast food choice cues considered in this paper incorporate the effects of three distinct perception cues that are consistent with the service quality construct (i.e., environment, employees, product) and the price cue (the monetary and non-monetary costs of what customers give up in an exchange). Service quality is traditionally conceived as the difference between customer expectations regarding a service, and perception regarding the service that is actually received (e.g., Parasuraman et al, 1988; Grönroos, 2001). Service quality is commonly considered as a multidimensional construct; its multidimensionality can be particularly relevant, especially in those hybrid service contexts (i.e., where tangible and intangible service components are equally relevant, see Prentice, 2014), like restaurants. Studies on service quality effects in restaurant settings have generally considered service quality as a multidimensional construct, to capture both the intangible and tangible components of this hybrid service setting. Several studies agreed in considering as key dimensions of restaurant service quality food, environment, and staff (e.g., Chow et al, 2007; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ryu and Han, 2011, Ryu et al, 2012).

2.3 Loyalty

Loyalty represents a core outcome for any product, brand, or service (e.g., Oliver, 1999). Restaurant chain brands differ from manufacturer brands because, in the end, dining is a service business (Berry, 2000). The brand loyalty of fast food chains like McDonald's is closely related with the loyalty to the store because any restaurant brand is essentially connected to a physical store (e.g., Fullerton, 2005). Jara and Cliquet (2012) confirm that (service) brands' image is founded on store dimensions. Retailers' stores and restaurant chains can be viewed as their 'products' (Zentes et al, 2008). Then, a restaurant fast food chain brand like McDonald's can be thought of as a group of the fast food restaurants which «carry a unique name, symbol, logo or combination thereof» (Zentes et al, 2008). Branding of restaurants chain influences customer perceptions, and encourages store (restaurant) choice and loyalty (e.g., Hartman & Spiro, 2005).

Researchers distinguish between behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (e.g., Bowen and Chen, 2001). Behavioral loyalty may not reflect actual customer loyalty (e.g., Han and Ryu, 2009). While behavioral loyalty refers only to actual repurchase/repatronage (Dick and Basu, 1994), attitudinal loyalty appears a more comprehensive construct, encompassing, for example, customer intentions and word of mouth (e.g., Yoo and Bai, 2013). In some cases, loyalty can be difficult to build. For example, both in the case of hotels and restaurants, customers commonly hold different memberships: frequent patronage might not be an actual signal of loyalty (Back, 2005). In a similar manner, fast food restaurant customers tend to be driven by the need to obtain the best bargain, rather than developing an actual appreciation of a specific brand (Reich et al, 2006). Hence, behavioral loyalty might be an insufficient indicator of loyalty in the specific case of fast-food restaurants. For this reason, an attitudinal loyalty perspective has been chosen in this paper (e.g., Ha and Jang, 2010).

Attitudinal loyalty can be developed through three phases (Oliver, 1999; Back, 2005). cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty. Cognitive loyalty refers to functional

characteristics of a product, brand, or service (Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006). Customers that are loyal from an affective point of view, both like the specific product, brand, or service, and express satisfaction with it (Oliver, 1999). Conative loyalty refers to intention to repurchase: it entails a strong brand commitment (Harris and Goode, 2004). Conative loyalty is considered as a strong predictor of loyalty (Pedersen and Nysveen, 2001). Some scholars have suggested the independence of these three phases (e.g, Li and Petrick, 2008); others have confirmed the positive relation between cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty (e.g., Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006; Yuksel et al., 2010). However, so far, no consensus with respect to the loyalty development process has been reached (Kim et al, 2012). Hence, this study just considers the three dimensions of attitudinal loyalty, without any kind of relationship or sequence between each other (Kim et al, 2012).

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1 Self-congruity and Loyalty

Customers develop an internal imagery with respect to a certain product, brand, or service, through a variety of cues: for example, through direct contact or through word-of-mouth communications (e.g., Aaker, 1999). A close customer perceived match between his/her own self-image, and a product/brand perceived image (i.e., high perceived self-congruity, Liu et al, 2012) has been demonstrated to exert strong, direct effects on customer attitudes and perceptions (e.g., Back, 2005; Liu et al, 2012; Lu and Xu, 2015).

A direct link between self-congruity and customer loyalty has been confirmed by several studies (e.g., Sirgy, 1986; Back, 2005; Kressmann et al, 2006; Sirgy et al, 2008; Liu et al, 2012). This direct impact has been confirmed in the case of store loyalty (e.g., Das, 2014), in the case of destination loyalty (e.g., Liu et al, 2012), and with respect to brands (e.g., Kang et al, 2013; Lu and Xu, 2015). Investigations regarding antecedents of loyalty in the restaurant

industry have devoted negligible attention in examining the role of self-congruity (e.g., Line and Hanks, 2016). Even fewer are the existing studies investigating the effects of self-congruity on customer behavior in the fast-food sector (e.g., Yoon and Kim, 2016). To contribute filling this huge literature gap, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Self-congruity has a positive direct effect on loyalty regarding a fast-food chain

3.2 Self-congruity and key fast- food cues

Higher self-congruity perceived by a customer is an important outcome for a product, brand, or service (Liu et al, 2012). Higher self-congruity would mean more favorable attitudes (e.g., Graeff, 1997) and customer behavior in general (e.g., Sirgy et al, 1997; Back, 2005). A possible biasing effect of self-congruity, with respect to customer perception of functional attributes, was also suggested. In other words, a positive perception of self-congruity (i.e., product/service/brand image perceived as close to the customer's self-concept) might positively influence customer perception of utilitarian product/brand/service attributes. Different studies (e.g., Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al, 1991) have demonstrated this biasing effect of self-concept. Lu and Xu (2015) found that positive self-congruity has a positive effect on the perception of product quality. Self-congruity has been found as positively influencing customer perceptions of service quality in general. A cognitive relationship between customers and products has been found as significantly influencing perception of quality (e.g., Quester and Karunaratna, 2000; Das, 2015). A positive link has been confirmed between customer image congruity with a certain product, brand, or service, and customer perceptions of products (e.g., Graeff, 1996). Das (2014) suggests how product quality perceptions can be positively influenced by a closer, perceived customer congruity with a certain product, brand, or service. In the restaurant industry, some studies have noticed

a positive relationship between some key restaurant cues and customers' willingness to act as reference customers (e.g., Helgesen et al, 2010; Nam and Lee, 2011).

Basing on the discussion above, and on the considerations made for key restaurant cues selected in this paper, the following hypotheses are derived:

H2a: self-congruity has a positive direct effect on customer environment perceptions.

H2b: self-congruity has a positive direct effect on customer service perceptions.

H2c: self-congruity has a positive direct effect on customer product perceptions.

H2d: self-congruity has a positive direct effect on customer price perceptions.

3.2 Key fast-food cues and loyalty

Research has provided some suggestions about the factors that might influence most customer behavior in the fast food industry (e.g., Ness et al, 2002). Physical environment has been identified as a factor exerting a relevant influence on customer perceptions and behavior, in the context of restaurants (e.g., Han and Ryu, 2009; Li and Jang, 2009; Ryu et al, 2012). Service provided by employees is believed to be a crucial determinant of customer loyalty in the fast-food restaurant industry (e.g., Reich et al, 2006). Product (i.e., food quality) represents the major factor in determining loyalty-related behavior in restaurant settings (e.g., Clark and Wood, 1999; Ha and Jang, 2010). Price perception has been found to be significantly related to higher loyalty (Sirohi et al, 1998). Such positive perception in terms of price also appears as significantly related to positive customer outcomes, such as customer retention (Ranaweera and Neely, 2003). Among non-monetary costs, a relevant role is covered by time costs (e.g., Baker et al, 2002). In a restaurant context, such non-monetary costs have been found as strongly influencing purchasing intentions (Ashton et al, 2010). This appears even more important in fast-food contexts, in which the possibility to get the best deal is a fundamental selection criterion for customers.

Basing on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are derived:

H3a: Environment perceptions have a positive direct effect on loyalty

H3b: Service perceptions have a positive direct effect on loyalty

H3c: Product perceptions have a positive direct effect on loyalty

H3d: Price perceptions have a positive direct effect on loyalty

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of the present work, that integrates theories from self-congruity theory (e.g., Sirgy, 1982) with Zeithaml's (1988) proposal.

Two fundamental building blocks can be identified in the model:

1. The effects of self-congruity on customer loyalty: a direct effect, and an indirect effect through the mediation of key fast food choice cues;

2. The impact on customer loyalty of restaurant key fast food choice cues (i.e., environment, service, product, and price);

The overall sequence of effects in the model is that self-congruity affects customer perceptions related to store environment, employees service, product quality and price, which, in turn, affect loyalty.

4. Methodology

4.1 Measures, sample, data collection

A pilot test and a questionnaire were used to measure the constructs. All items were assessed using a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). All the measurement scale items used in the present paper were adapted from previous studies (see Table 2).

To ensure validity in the translation of the questionnaire, the back-translation procedure as in Chen et al (2005) was followed. The structured and pre-designed questionnaire was pre-

tested among a sample of 15 African customers of a McDonald's fast food located in Marrakech (Morocco) and 15 African customers of a McDonald's fast food located in Cairo (Egypt), to make sure that survey questions were clear. Only minor changes were made to the questionnaire based on the pre-test results. Finally, data were collected from African customers in McDonald's fast food restaurants. Subjects were selected for the study using an intercept technique or convenience sample. The intercept technique allowed collection of information from respondents assumed to represent the population being studied (Aaker et al., 1999). It was felt that restaurant intercept (exit interviews) would capture the recency effect (Zameer and Mukherjee, 2011). Data collectors were instructed to randomly intercept customers in four McDonald's fast food restaurants in Casablanca and Marrakech (Morocco), and in Cairo and Sharm-El-Sheik (Egypt). Trained research assistants helped collecting the data via paper and pencil after the respondents had finished their meal, and were leaving the restaurant. The intercept technique was used to randomly select 461 African customers from the two McDonald's fast food restaurants in Egypt, and 450 African customers from the two McDonald's fast food restaurants in Morocco. In total, 911 administered questionnaires were retrieved from the four McDonald's fast food restaurants, between February 15 to April 20, 2015. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of respondents. With respect to gender, the number of male customers appears slightly higher than the number of females (less than twenty units). Surveyed customers are mostly grouped between 19 and 49 years old. Mainly students consume McDonald's food (265 units), followed by employees (133). Finally, with respect to the education profile, 639 units hold either a High School diploma, or a bachelor degree.

4.2 Methodology and Results

Construct measures were employed from previous studies, and were all quite well validated and tested. An exploratory factor analysis conducted with the method of maximum likelihood with oblique rotation (promax, Kim & Mueller, 1978) suggested a six-factor solution that accounted 59.82% of variance. The considered scales displayed sufficient reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .95 for Self-Congruity, .93 for Environment Perception, .93 for Employee (i.e., Service) Perception, .91 for Product Perception, .93 for Price Perception, .91 for Loyalty (for item-specific details, please refer to the Appendix). The analysis proceeded to estimate the structural model to further examine the proposed hypotheses.

The conceptual model was tested using the SPSS AMOS program (version 18). The typical two-stage analysis (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) has been followed, that began with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement models with one exogenous and five endogenous latent variables. Three measures served to evaluate the internal consistency of constructs: standardized loadings (λ), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Table 3 summarizes the CRs, AVEs and correlations among the latent variables. First, as Table 2 shows, the λs are statistically significant and sufficiently high (ranging from 0.523 to 0.918), meaning that the underlying constructs were suitably measured. Second, the CRs for all six constructs (from Table 3) range between 0.912 and 0.954, all greater than the suggested cut-off value of 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Third, the AVEs except for Product (0.458) and Environment (0.485), are greater than the threshold value of 0.50 and thus indicating high internal consistency (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

The model displays an acceptable fit, with a relative/normed chi-square of 3.753, p<.001; RMSEA = 0.055; CFI = 0.894; AGFI=0.807; GFI=0.83.

Significance of indirect effects was examined following the procedures indicated by Preacher and Hayes (2008). As suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008), specifying and testing a

multiple mediation model might be better than testing separate simple mediation models when more mediators are present. Including several mediators in one model increases the practicality of the hypothesized model, by testing to what extent one factor mediates the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable when other mediators are present. As shown in Table 4 findings revealed that the indirect effects of self-congruity on loyalty through environment perceptions, service perceptions, and product perceptions were significant. At the same time, the direct effect of self-congruity on loyalty is strong (.49) and significant (p<.01), suggesting thereby partial mediation for each of the included mediators. Additionally, results show that self-congruity explains a substantial proportion of variance (R=.41; F=160.44; p<.001).

5. Discussion and implications

This paper focuses on a mostly unexplored topic: the direct and mediated relationship between self-congruity and loyalty in fast food restaurant industry, in a cognitively- and culturally-specific research context (North African countries). Very few contributions have verified whether, widely known and tested constructs in marketing research, are relevant also in African markets. Given the specific conditions of these contexts (see Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2016 and the Introduction), marketing scholars are increasingly calling for further investigations of these countries (e.g., Lages et al, 2015; Mellahi and Mol, 2015; Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2016).

This paper represents an effort in this direction: as a first step toward a deeper understanding of African consumers, it investigated the role of self-congruity (a well-known marketing construct) on African consumer behavior. According to the results of this study, self-congruity seems to be the most powerful and important antecedent of loyalty. This can be

explained by different reasons. Consider the specific setting in which the study has been conducted: North African countries are, in general, nations in which Islamic religion is predominant. In Islamic countries, religious prescriptions have a strong impact on everyday life and choices. Consumption choices are thereby included (e.g., Shah et al, 2011). Individual identity is also shaped by the cultural context in which one is raised (e.g., Oyserman and Lee, 2008). In this sense, it is very likely that North-African consumers' self-concept is, in some components, shaped by religious influences, an integral part of national culture. Therefore, self-congruity perceptions with respect to products, brands, or services might play a crucial role in determining consumers' choices and behavioral outcomes in these countries. This consideration is confirmed in the present model, by the notable strength of the direct relationship involving self-congruity and loyalty.

Regarding the single relations within the model, first it must be noted the highly positive influence of self-congruity on customer perception of restaurant cues (i.e., environment, employee, product, price). This confirms the suggestion of some scholars (e.g., Massicotte et al, 2011): a positive perception of self-congruity influences customer utilitarian perceptions, in this case of restaurant cues. Self-congruity exerts a sort of biasing effect on customers' perception of a product/brand/service attributes. This point, already known by scholars, has been documented, so far, usually with respect to consumers' functional congruity (e.g., Sirgy et al, 2000; Kang et al, 2012; Ahn et al, 2013).

From a managerial point of view, it appears useful to consider research findings for each single relation. Consider the environment mediation between self-congruity and loyalty. In fast-food restaurants (Mason et al, 2016) it has been found that elements like interior design, pleasant décor, pleasant music, subdued lighting, ambient odors, spacious layout, appealing table settings, and attractive colors can improve consumers' overall experience (Ryu and Han, 2010). In North African contexts, the previous list of environmental characteristics

needs to be interpreted from a self-congruity perspective: for example, the symbolic component of design and décor must be customized and developed according to local customs (e.g., the green color as a symbol of Islam; music from local artists, graphic symbols clearly different in terms of calligraphic representation). Fast food industries can also improve loyalty by providing excellent services, based on employee interaction. As highlighted by Harris and Ogbonna (2006), poorly managed employees can negatively influence loyalty. As in the case of food, having properly trained employees might require a local contextualization in terms, for example, of level of empowerment: the ability to interact, to inspire confidence, the correct level of friendliness, the appearance, should be coherent with certain social and cultural rules (e.g., the use of hijab in public spaces, the interactions between men and women, and so forth). With respect to product, in addition to core elements like: traditional, fresh ingredients, reasonable high quality meat, consistent delivery food (Pettijohn et al, 1997), or health issues (i.e., nutritious menus including fruit, vegetables, leaner meats and meat with less preservatives), products need also to be consistent with local tastes and religious/cultural prescriptions. In the case in which religious prescriptions provide very stringent regulations of food consumption (i.e., Halal food in Islamic cultures, or Kosher prescriptions for Hebraic religion), providing quality meals would mean providing goods complying with these religious and cultural rules. From this point of view, therefore, a careful localization of the offering appears a key source of competitive advantage. Finally, the relationship between price and loyalty has been found as statistically non-significant in the estimated model. The model tested in this study also suggests very significant relationships between single restaurant cues and loyalty. This can be seen from two, different perspectives. First, the positive bias of self-congruity on functional perceptions might reinforce the direct effect of self-congruity on loyalty. Second, the highly significant relationships between

restaurant cues and loyalty might just confirm the findings of previous studies on traditional restaurant settings, highlighting the important role of these cues.

In the end, the presence of both direct and mediated effects regarding self-congruity opens the way, from a managerial point of view, to further developments. Global fast-food companies need to coherently integrate brand management components to build upon this direct relationship between self-congruity and loyalty, based on at least three mediating, significant variables. In addition, marketers must be wide aware of the difference between brand management related to the mediating variables depicted in this study, and brand management entailing the direct relationship between self-congruity and loyalty. In other words, cultural positioning of the fast food chains must be recognized by marketers as a key attribute of the offering itself, within a localization strategy of a brand.

6. Limitations and further research

This study presents some shortcomings. First, the entire sample was made of customers that had already consumed in a McDonald's fast food restaurant. Thereby, results might be biased, because surveyed African customers might have already developed a certain degree of loyalty toward the McDonald's restaurants. Albeit results might suggest that these recurring customers might also exhibit attitudinal loyalty, to support connections between self-congruity and loyalty, research should be also extended to consumers trying McDonald's restaurants for the first time. In a nutshell, considering only customers that already have had an experience in McDonald's restaurants might represent an issue regarding sample representativeness. Given the lack of research in North African contexts, many are the possible, further extensions related to this research. For example, this kind of model can be applied to those contexts in which, with respect to utilitarian attributes, only functional congruity was investigated (e.g., Kang et al, 2012). Another possible avenue for future

research is represented by a different choice of relevant restaurant cues. Single cues can be also further explored: for example, environmental psychology models can be applied to explore the impact of diverse environmental cues (e.g., music, lighting, temperature, and so forth). The African continent is made of several regional realities, each one expressing a unique mixture of context-specific attributes. Characteristics of regional areas of the African continent greatly vary between one another. These relevant differences must be fully explored and evaluated, calling for further research efforts. For this reason, an application of the same framework developed in this study in different African areas (e.g., Central Africa) might appear interesting. Such consideration might actually find fertile ground also in the present paper: further insights might be obtained by applying the presented model to single countries of the study (i.e., a multi group model for Egypt and Morocco).

References

Aaker, J. (1999). The malleable self: The role of self-expression in persuasion. *Journal of Marketing Research* 36, 45-57

Abdul-Muhmin, A.G. (2005). Instrumental and interpersonal determinants of relationship satisfaction and commitment in industrial markets. *Journal of Business Research 58*, 619-28.

Abel, J. I., Buff, C. L., O'Neill, J. C. (2013). Actual self-concept versus ideal self-concept: An examination of image congruence and consumers in the health club industry. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 3(1), 78-96.

Aguirre-Rodriguez, A., Bosnjak, M., & Sirgy, M. J. (2012). Moderators of the self-congruity effect on consumer decision-making: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(8), 1179-1188.

Ahmed, S.A. and d'Astous, A. (2008). Antecedents, moderators and dimensions of country-of-origin evaluations. *International Marketing Review*, *25*(1), 75-106.

Ahn, T., Ekinci, Y., & Li, G. (2013). Self-congruence, functional congruence, and destination choice. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(6), 719-723.

Ashton, A. S., Scott, N., Solnet, D., & Breakey, N. (2010). Hotel restaurant dining: The relationship between perceived value and intention to purchase. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, *10*(3), 206-218.

Back, K.-J. (2005). The effects of image congruence on customers' brand loyalty in the upper middle-class hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 29(4), 448–467.

Baek, S. H., Ham, S., & Yang, I. S. (2006). A cross-cultural comparison of fast food restaurant selection criteria between Korean and Filipino college students. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *25*(4), 683-698.

Baker, J., Parasuraman, A., Grewal, D., Voss, G. B. (2002). The influence of multiple store environment cues on perceived merchandise value and patronage intentions. *Journal of marketing*, *66*(2), 120-141.

Batislam, E.P., Denizel, M. and Filiztekin, A. (2007). Empirical validation and comparison of models for customer base analysis. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 201-209.

Berry, L. (2000). Cultivating service brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 28*(1), 128–137

Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *The Journal of Marketing*, 57-71.

Bowen, J. T., & Chen, S. (2001). The relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13, 213–217.

Chen, H. C., Holton III, E. F., & Bates, R. (2005). Development and validation of the learning transfer system inventory in Taiwan. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *16*(1), 55-84.

Chow, I.H., Lau, V.P., Lo, T.Y., Sha, Z. & Yun, H. (2007). Service quality in restaurant operations in China: decision- and experiential-oriented perspectives. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 698-710

Clark, M. A., &Wood, R. C. (1999). Consumer loyalty in the restaurant industry: A preliminary exploration of the issues. *British Food Journal*, 101(4), 317–327.

Das, G. (2014). Impacts of retail brand personality and self-congruity on store loyalty: the moderating role of gender. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer services*, 21(2), 130-138.

Das, G. (2015). Linkages between self-congruity, brand familiarity, perceived quality and purchase intention: A study of fashion retail brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 6(3), 180-193.

De Chernatony, L. (2010). *Creating powerful brands*. Routledge.

De Nisco, A., & Warnaby, G. (2014). Urban design and tenant variety influences on consumers' emotions and approach behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(2), 211-217.

Dick, A. S., & Basu, K. (1994). Customer loyalty: Toward an integrated conceptual framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22, 99–113.

Ekinci, Y., & Riley, M. (2003). An investigation of self-concept: Actual and ideal self-congruence compared in the context of service evaluation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 10(4), 201–214.

Ekinci, Y., Dawes, P. L., & Massey, G. R. (2008). An extended model of the antecedents and consequences of consumer satisfaction for hospitality services. *European Journal of Marketing* (Vol. 42).

Essoussi, L.H. and Merunka, D. (2007). Consumers' product evaluations in emerging markets: does country of design, country of manufacture, or brand image matter? *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 409-426

European Parliament Research Service. Africa's economic growth. (2016). http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/573891/EPRS_IDA(2016)57389 1_EN.pdf Accessed 20.03.17

Evanschitzky, H. and Wunderlich, M. (2006). An examination of moderator effects in the four-stage loyalty model. *Journal of Service Research*, Vol.8, No.4, pp. 330-45.

Fullerton, G. (2005). The impact of brand commitment on loyalty to retail service brands. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, 22*(2), 97–110

Goyal, A., & Singh, N. P. (2007). Consumer perception about fast food in India: an exploratory study. *British Food Journal*, 109(2), 182-195.

Graeff, T. R. (1996). Using promotional messages to manage the effects of brand and self-image on brand evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 13(3), 4–18.

Graeff, T. R. (1997). Consumption Situations and the Effects of Brand Image on Consumers' Brand Evaluations. *Psychology & Marketing*, 14(1), 49–70

Grönroos, C. (2001). The perceived service quality concept-a mistake? *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 11(3), 150-152.

Ha, J., & Jang, S. (2010). Effects of service quality and food quality: The moderating role of atmospherics in an ethnic restaurant segment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29(3), 520–529.

Haj-Salem, N., Chebat, J. C., Michon, R., & Oliveira, S. (2016). Why male and female shoppers do not see mall loyalty through the same lens? The mediating role of self-congruity. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(3), 1219-1227.

Han, H., & Ryu, K. (2009). The Roles of the Physical Environment, Price Perception, and Customer Satisfaction in Determining Customer Loyalty in the Restaurant Industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 33(4), 487–510.

Harris, C.; Goode, M. (2004). The Four Levels of Loyalty and the Pivotal Role of Trust: A Study of Online Service Dynamics. *Journal of Retailing*, 80 (2), 139–58.

Harris, L., & Ogbonna, E. (2006). Service sabotage: A study of antecedents and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(4), 543–558.

Hartman, K. B., & Spiro, R. L. (2005). Recapturing store image in customer-based store equity: a construct conceptualization. *Journal of Business research*, *58*(8), 1112-1120.

He, H., & Mukherjee, A. (2007). I am, ergo I shop: does store image congruity explain shopping behaviour of Chinese consumers? *Journal of Marketing Management*, 23(5–6), 443–460.

Helgesen, Ø., Håvold, J., Nesset, E. (2010). Impacts of Store and Chain Images on the "Quality-Satisfaction-Loyalty Process" in Petrol Retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 17 (2), 109–18.

Hosany, S., & Martin, D. (2012). Self-image congruence in consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(5), 685–691.

Hyun, S. S. (2010). Predictors of relationship quality and loyalty in the chain restaurant industry. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 51(2), 251–267

Jamal, A., & Goode, M. M. H. (2001). Consumers and brands: A study of the impact of self-image congruence on brand preference and satisfaction. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 19(7), 482–492.

Jang, S., & Namkung, Y. (2009). Perceived quality, emotions, and behavioral intentions: Application of an extended Mehrabian – Russell model to restaurants. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(4), 451–460.

Jani, D., & Han, H. (2015). Influence of environmental stimuli on hotel customer emotional loyalty response: Testing the moderating effect of the big five personality factors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 44, 48-57.

Jara, M., & Cliquet, G. (2012). Retail brand equity: Conceptualisation and measurement. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 19*(1), 140–149.

Kalliny, M. (2010). Are they really that different from us: a comparison of Arab and American newspaper advertising, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, *32*(1), 95-108.

Kang, J., Tang, L., Lee, J. Y., & Bosselman, R. H. (2012). Understanding customer behavior in name-brand Korean coffee shops: The role of self-congruity and functional congruity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(3), 809–818.

Kara, A., Kaynak, E., & Kucukemiroglu, O. (1996). Positioning of fast-food outlets in two regions of North America: A comparative study using correspondence analysis. *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, *14*(2), 99-119.

Keillor, B. D., & Fields, D. M. (1996). Perceptions of a foreign service offering in an overseas market: The case of fast food in Hong Kong. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 9*(1), 83-104.

Keller, K. L., & Moorthi, Y. L. R. (2003). Branding in developing markets. *Business Horizons*, 46(3), 49-59.

Kim, S., Lee, J. S., & Kim, M. (2012). How different are first-time attendees from repeat attendees in convention evaluation?. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *31*(2), 544-553.

Kim, J., & Mueller, C. (1978). *Factor Analysis: Statistical Methods and Practical Issues*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kolk, A., & Rivera-Santos, M. (2016). The State of Research on Africa in Business and Management Insights From a Systematic Review of Key International Journals. *Business & Society*, 1-22

Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M. J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S., & Lee, D. J. (2006). Direct and indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(9), 955–964.

Lages, C. R., Pfajfar, G., & Shoham, A. (2015). Challenges in conducting and publishing research on the Middle East and Africa in leading journals. *International Marketing Review*, 32(1), 52–7707.

Lee, D., & Hyman, M. R. (2008). Hedonic/functional congruity between stores and private label brands. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 219-232.

Lee, M., & Ulgado, F. M. (1997). Consumer evaluations of fast-food services: a cross-national comparison. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 11(1), 39-52.

Lee, R., Klobas, J., Tezinde, T. and Murphy, J. (2010). The underlying social identities of a nation's brand, *International Marketing Review*, 27(4), 450-65.

Li, X., & Petrick, J. F. (2008). Reexamining the dimensionality of brand loyalty: A case of the cruise industry. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 25(1), 68-85.

Line, N. D., & Hanks, L. (2016). The other customer: The impact of self-image in restaurant patronage. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 8020(August), 1–18.

Liu, C. R., Lin, W. R., & Wang, Y. C. (2012). Relationship between self-congruity and destination loyalty: Differences between first-time and repeat visitors. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 1(1), 118-123.

Liu, Y., & Jang, S. (2009). The effects of dining atmospherics: An extended Mehrabian-Russell model. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28*(4), 494-503

Lu, J., & Xu, Y. (2015). Chinese young consumers' brand loyalty toward sportswear products: a perspective of self-congruity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(4), 365–376.

Mason, K., Jones, S., Benefield, M., & Walton, J. (2016). Building consumer relationships in the quick service restaurant industry. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 19(4), 368-381.

Massicotte, M., Michon, R., Chebat, J., Sirgy, M.J., Borges, A., (2011). Effects of mall atmosphere on mall evaluation: teenage versus adult shoppers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 18 (1), 74–80.

Maumbe, B. (2012). The rise of South Africa's quick service restaurant industry. *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies*, 2(2), 147-166.

Mellahi, K., & Mol, M. J. (2015). Africa is just like every other place, in that it is unlike any other place. *Africa Journal of Management*, 1(2), 201-209.

Mergenthaler, M., Weinberger, K., Qaim, M. (2009). The food system transformation in developing countries: a disaggregate demand analysis for fruits and vegetables in Vietnam. *Food Policy 34*, 426–436.

Nam, J. H., & Lee, T. J. (2011). Foreign travelers' satisfaction with traditional Korean restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(4), 982-989.

Namkung, Y., & Jang, S. (2008). Are highly satisfied restaurant customers really different? A quality perception perspective. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(2), 142–155.

Ness, M., Gorton, M., & Kuznesof, S. (2002). The student food shopper: Segmentation on the basis of attitudes to store features and shopping behaviour. *British Food Journal*, 104(7), 506-525.

Oliver, R. (1999). Whence Consumer Loyalty? *The Journal of Marketing*, 63, 33–44.

Oyserman, D., & Lee, S. W. (2008). Does culture influence what and how we think? Effects of priming individualism and collectivism. *Psychological bulletin*,134(2), 311.

Paharia, N., Keinan, A., Avery, J., & Schor, J. B. (2011). The underdog effect: The marketing of disadvantage and determination through brand biography. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 775-790.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). Servqual: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perc. *Journal of retailing*, *64*(1), 12.

Park, C. (2004). Efficient or enjoyable? Consumer values of eating-out and fast food restaurant consumption in Korea. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *23*(1), 87-94.

Pedersen, P., & Nysveen, H. (2001). Shopbot banking: An exploratory study of customer loyalty effect. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 19, 146-155.

Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of international business studies*, *39*(5), 920-936.

Pettijohn, L., Pettijohn, C., & Luke, R. (1997). An evaluation of fast food restaurants satisfaction: Determinants, competitive comparisons and impact on future patronage. *Journal of Restaurant & Foodservice Marketing*, 2(3), 27–41.

Popkin, B., 2004. The nutrition transition: an overview of world patterns of change. *Nutrition Review* 62, S140–S143.

Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior research methods*, *40*(3), 879-891.

Prentice, C. (2014). Who stays, who walks, and why in high-intensity service contexts. *Journal of Business Research*, *67*(4), 608-614.

Quester, P., Karunaratna, A., Goh, L. K. (2000). Self-congruity and product evaluation: a cross-cultural study. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 17(6), 525–535.

Ranaweera, C., Neely, A. (2003). Some moderating effects on the service quality-customer retention link. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 23(2), 230–248.

Reardon, T., Timmer, C. (2012). The economics of the food system revolution. *Annual Review Resource Economics* 4, 225–264.

Reich, A. Z., McCleary, K. W., Tepanon, Y., Weaver, P. A. (2006). The impact of product and service quality on brand loyalty: An exploratory investigation of quick-service restaurants. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 8(3), 35-53.

Rischke, R., Kimenju, S. C., Klasen, S., & Qaim, M. (2015). Supermarkets and food consumption patterns: The case of small towns in Kenya. *Food Policy*, *52*, 9-21.

Rivera-Santos, M., Holt, D., Littlewood, D., & Kolk, A. (2015). Social entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, *29*(1), 72-91.

Ross, I. (1971). Self-concept and brand preference. *The Journal of Business*,44(1), 38-50.

Ryu, K., & Han, H. (2011). New or repeat customers: How does physical environment influence their restaurant experience? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(3), 599-611

Ryu, K., Lee, H.-R., & Kim, W. G. (2012). The influence of the quality of the physical environment, food, and service on restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 24(2), 200–223.

Schary, P. B. (1971). Consumption and the Problem of Time. *The Journal of Marketing*, 50-55.

Shah A. S., Mohd, R., & Hisham, B. (2011). Is religiosity an important determinant on Muslim consumer behaviour in Malaysia? *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 2(1), 83-96.

Sidali, K.L., & Hemmerling, S. (2014). Developing an authenticity model of traditional food specialties: Does the self-concept of consumers matter?. *British Food Journal*, 116(11), 1692-1709.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of consumer research*, *9*(3), 287-300.

Sirgy, M. J., & Samli, A. C. (1985). A path analytic model of store loyalty involving self-concept, store image, geographic loyalty, and socioeconomic status. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *13*(3), 265-291.

Sirgy, M. J. (1986). *Self-congruity: toward a theory of personality and cybernetics*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Sirgy M.J., Johar J.S., Samli A.C., Claiborne C.B.. (1991) Self-congruity versus functional congruity: predictors of consumer behavior. *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*;19 (4):363–75.

Sirgy M.J., Grewal D., Mangleburg T., Park J.O., et al. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self- congruity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*; 25:229–41

Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., & Mangleburg, T. (2000). Retail environment, self-congruity, and retail patronage: An integrative model and a research agenda. *Journal of Business research*, *49*(2), 127-138.

Sirgy M.J., Su, C. (2000). Destination image, self-congruity, and travel behaviour: toward an integrative model. *Journal of Travel Research*;38(4):340–52.

Sirgy, M. J., Lee, D. J., Johar, J. S., & Tidwell, J. (2008). Effect of self-congruity with sponsorship on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*,61(10), 1091-1097.

Sirohi, N. McLaughlin, E. W., Wittink, D. (1998). A Model of Consumer Perceptions and Store Loyalty Intentions for a Supermarket. *Journal of Retailing*, 74 (2), 223-225.

Soriano, D. (2002). Customers' expectations factors in restaurants: The situation in Spain. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, 19(8/9), 1055–1067.

Srivastava, R. K. (2015). How differing demographic factors impact consumers' loyalty towards national or international fast food chains: A comparative study in emerging markets. *British Food Journal*, *117*(4), 1354-1376.

Steenkamp, J.E.M. and Burgess, S.M. (2002). Optimum stimulation level and exploratory consumer behavior in an emerging consumer market, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *19*(2), 131-50

Tepeci, M. (1999). Increasing brand loyalty in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *11*(5), 223-230.

Turley, L. W., & Milliman, R. E. (2000). Atmospheric effects on shopping behavior: a review of the experimental evidence. *Journal of business research*, *49*(2), 193-211.

Vignali, C. (2001). McDonald's:"think global, act local"–the marketing mix. *British Food Journal*, *103*(2), 97-111.

Watson, J. (1998). *Golden arches east: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford University Press.

Wilhelmina, Q., Joost, J., George, E., & Guido, R. (2010). Globalization vs. localization: global food challenges and local solutions. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *34*(3), 357-366.

Yang, Z., Peterson, R. T. (2004). Customer perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty: the role of switching costs. *Psychology & Marketing*, 21(10), 799–822.

Yoo, M., Bai, B. (2013). Customer loyalty marketing research: A comparative approach between hospitality and business journals. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 33, 166–177.

Yoon, D., Kim, Y. (2016). Effects of Self-Congruity and Source Credibility on Consumer Responses to Coffeehouse Advertising. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 25(2), 167–196.

Yuksel, A., Yuksel, F., Bilim, Y., 2010. Destination attachment: effects on customer satisfaction and cognitive, affective and conative loyalty. *Tourism Management* 31 (2), 274–284.

Zameer, A., & Mukherjee, D. (2011). Food and grocery retail: patronage behavior of indian urban consumers. *South Asian Journal of Management*,18(1), 119.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *The Journal of Marketing*, 31-46.

Zentes, J., Morschett, D., & Schramm-Klein, H. (2008). Brand personality of retailers—an analysis of its applicability and its effect in store loyalty. *The International Journal of Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research, 18*(2), 167–184.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model. Source: own elaboration
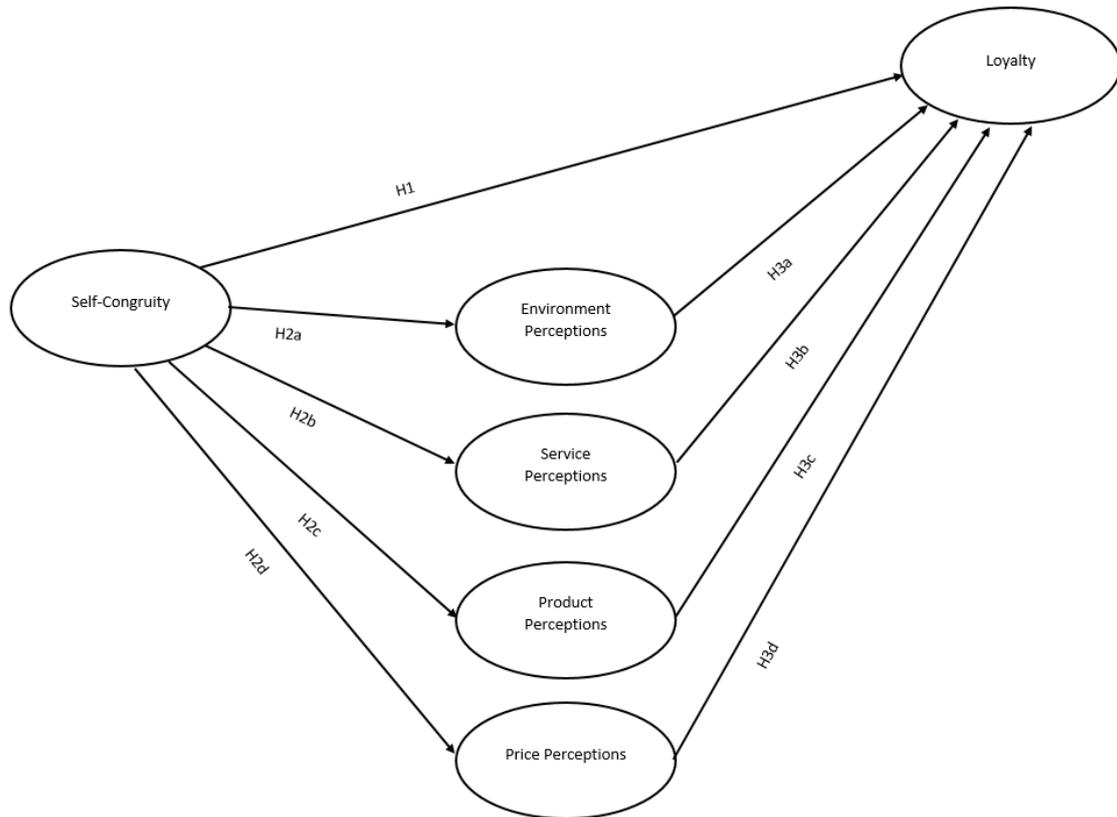
Fig. 2. Hypotheses testing results
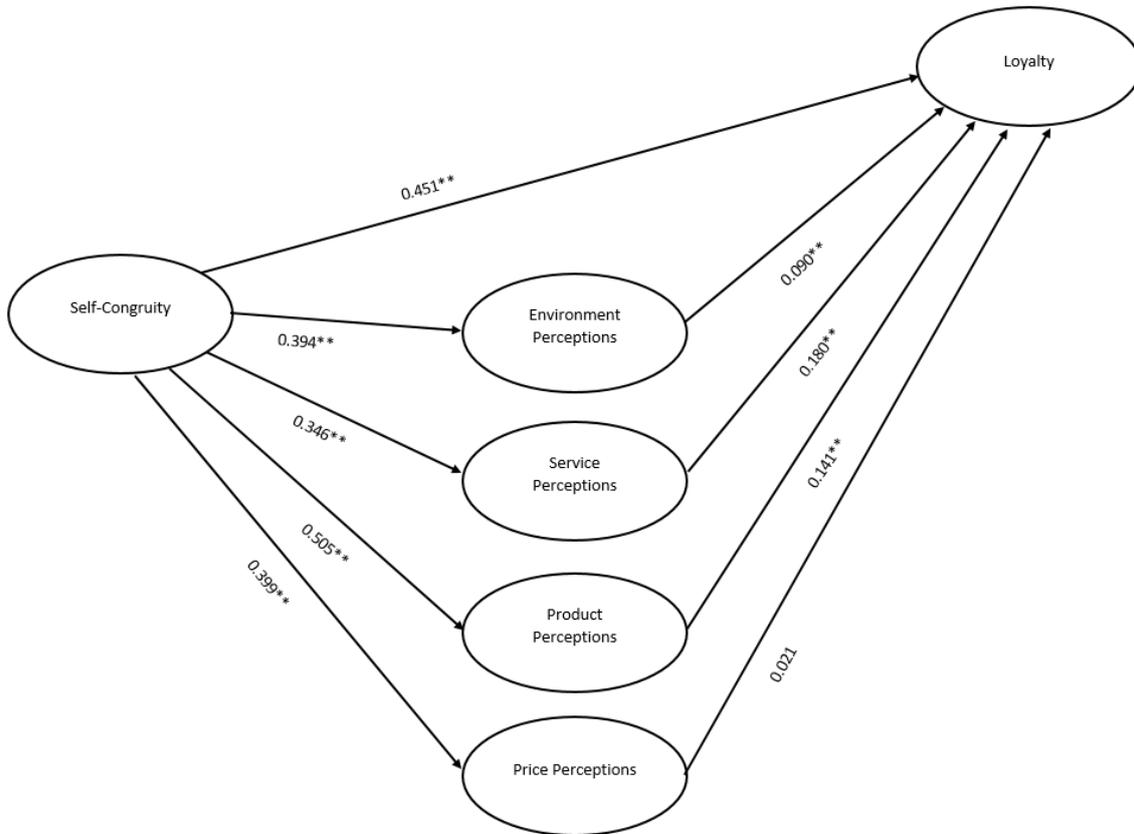
Note: **: p<0.05

Table 1. Socio demographic profile of respondents. Source: own elaboration

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	464	50.9
	Female	447	49.1
Total		*911*	*100.0*
Age	Less than 19 years old	90	9.9
	Between 19 and 29 years old	331	36.3
	Between 30 and 39 years old	222	24.4
	Between 40 and 49 years old	205	22.5
	Between 50 and 65 years old	48	5.3
	Over 65 years old	15	1.6
Total		*911*	*100.0*
Education	Elementary	25	2.7
	Primary school	84	9.4
	High school	426	46.7
	Bachelor	213	23.3
	Master of Science	124	13.6
	Other	39	4.3
Total		*911*	*100.0*
Occupation	Worker	65	7.1
	Employee	134	14.7
	Manager/Executive	54	5.9

Shopkeeper		40	4.4
Entrepreneur		39	4.3
Teacher/lecturer		133	14.6
Student		265	29.1
Housewife		66	6.6
Self-employed		37	4.1
Retired		34	3.7
Unemployed		44	4.8
Total		*911*	*100.0*

Table 2. Measurement model results. Source: own elaboration

Construct and description of items	Author Source (Adapted from)	Loading	t-value
Self-Congruity (Cronbach's α = 0.954)	**Ahn and Ekinci, 2013**		
The typical customer of this restaurant reflects the type of person that I am	Self Congruity	.875	
The typical customer of this restaurant is very much like me	Self Congruity	.916	41034
The image of the typical customer is similar to how I see myself	Self Congruity	.854	46.377
The image of the typical customer is similar to how others believe that I am	Self Congruity	.745	27702
The image of the typical customer is similar to how others see me	Self Congruity	.807	31.312
McDonald's restaurants are made for me	Self Congruity	.747	28095
McDonald's restaurants reflect my personality	Self Congruity	.896	39.256
The image of the typical customer is similar to how I would like to be	Self Congruity	.748	27762
The typical customer of this restaurant is quite similar to people that I admire	Self Congruity	.746	27.995
The image of the typical customer is similar to how I would like to see myself	Self Congruity	.845	34815
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I would like others to see me	Self-Congruity	.691	24.924
The image of the typical customer is similar to how I ideally like to be seen by others	Self Congruity	.684	24551
Environment perceptions (Cronbach's α = 0.933)	**Ryu and Jang, 2011; Jani and Han, 2015; De Nisco and Warnaby, 2014**		
The interior design is visually attractive	Environment Perceptions	.745	
The restaurant colors create a sense of well being	Environment Perceptions	.790	27.413

The overall design is attractive	Environment Perceptions	.802	24.172
In general, the internal layout makes the restaurant functional	Environment Perceptions	.765	22.907
Layout makes it easy for employees to move around	Environment Perceptions	.725	28.149
Wall decor and the floor decor are attractive	Environment Perceptions	.700	20.942
Wall decor and floor decor reflect the restaurant's theme	Environment Perceptions	.776	23.350
Furniture colors match with the floor and wall colors	Environment Perceptions	.587	17.372
In general, the furniture and the internal layout are harmonious	Environment Perceptions	.764	22.878
The internal ambience is comfortable	Environment Perceptions	.666	19.848
The dining room is clean	Environment Perceptions	.633	18.727
The linen (e.g., table cloths, napkin) and the tableware are clean	Environment Perceptions	.705	20.961
The linen (e.g., table cloths, napkin) are attractive	Environment Perceptions	.583	17.240
Layout gives me enough privacy	Environment Perceptions	.580	17.148
Toilets are clean	Environment Perceptions	.523	15.412
Service perceptions (Cronbach's α = 0.932)	**Lee and Ulgado (1997)**		
The employees are willing to help me	Service Perceptions	.816	
The employee's attitude inspires confidence	Service Perceptions	.765	25.455
The employees have been efficient in serving me	Service Perceptions	.808	27.200
The employees are well competent	Service Perceptions	.785	29.726
The employees satisfied my expectations	Service Perceptions	.779	31.117
The employees give me individual attention	Service Perceptions	.715	23.546
The employees are kind and friendly	Service Perceptions	.772	25.777
Overall, the interaction is of high quality	Service Perceptions	.792	26.274
The service I received is of a high quality	Service Perceptions	.610	19.329
The employees provide prompt service	Service Perceptions	.606	19.654
Employees have a neat appearance	Service Perceptions	.697	22.890
Product perceptions (Cronbach's α = 0.916)	**Lee and Ulgado (1997); Jang and Namkung (2009)**		
Food presentation is attractive	Product Perceptions	.711	
Food smells are agreeable	Product Perceptions	.674	24.171
The restaurant's menu offers a wide range of choices	Product Perceptions	.715	19.658

The restaurant offers healthy products	Product Perceptions	.691	20.539
The restaurant offers nutritious products	Product Perceptions	.689	18.891
The restaurant serves tasty food	Product Perceptions	.740	22.981
The restaurant offers fresh food	Product Perceptions	.627	20.380
The restaurant offers locally produced products	Product Perceptions	.690	19.125
The restaurant offers products of controlled quality	Product Perceptions	.721	19.548
Helpings are adequate	Product Perceptions	.682	19.111
Food presentation is appropriate	Product Perceptions	.636	17.896
Food is served at the right temperature	Product Perceptions	.615	17.179
Food presentation is visually appealing	Product Perceptions	.581	16.290
Price perceptions (Cronbach's α = 0.933)	**Baker et al (2002); Haj-Salem et al (2016)**		
Considering prices, product quality is good	Price Perceptions	.918	
Prices at McDonald's are fair	Price Perceptions	.856	37.915
I obtain value for my money at McDonald's	Price Perceptions	.846	33.661
Mc Donald is worth my time	Price Perceptions	.846	33.641
I obtain value for my time at McDonald's	Price Perceptions	.815	32.592
Loyalty (Cronbach's α = 0.912)	**Back (2005)**		
McDonald's provides me superior service quality as compared to any other fast-food chain	Loyalty	.770	
No other fast-food chains perform services better than McDonald's	Loyalty	.765	24.976
McDonald's has more benefits than others in its category	Loyalty	.787	29.251
I love staying at McDonald's	Loyalty	.790	25.396
I feel better when I stay at McDonald's	Loyalty	.700	20.148
I like McDonald's more than other fast-food chain	Loyalty	.684	19.550
Even if another fast-food chain is offering a lower price, I would still choose McDonald's	Loyalty	.644	18.390
I intend to continue choosing McDonald's	Loyalty	.645	18.426
I consider McDonald's to be my first fast-food choice	Loyalty	.643	18.278

Table 3. Correlations among constructs, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Source: own elaboration

Construct	N. Items	CR	AVE	Correlation of latent construct					
				Loyalty	Environment Perc.	Self-Congruity	Service Perc.	Product Perc.	Price Perc.
Loyalty	9	0.912	0.538	**0.733**					
Environment Perceptions	15	0.933	0.485	0.431	**0.696**				
Self-Congruity	12	0.954	0.637	0.608	0.372	**0.798**			
Service Perceptions	11	0.932	0.558	0.453	0.540	0.321	**0.747**		
Product Perceptions	13	0.916	0.458	0.519	0.579	0.488	0.620	**0.677**	
Price Perceptions	5	0.933	0.735	0.335	0.478	0.385	0.291	0.396	**0.857**

Table 4. Results of mediation test

	Estimated Effect	CI_{low}	CI_{high}
Total	0.12**	0.08	0.16
Environment Perceptions	0.03**	0.01	0.06
Service Perceptions	0.05**	0.02	0.08
Product Perceptions	0.04**	0.01	0.08

*Notes. **: $p < 0.05$; CI: Confidence Intervals*