

Exploring the Influence of Consumer Brand Identification on Online Brand Advocacy: The Mediating Role of Consumer Brand Engagement in Online Travel Agencies

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To what extent does consumer brand identification influence online brand advocacy among online travel agency (OTA) website users through the mediating effect of consumer- brand engagement?

Abstract and keywords

The aim of this study was to analyze if consumer brand identification had an influence on online brand advocacy through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement. Therefore, the research questions this study attempts to answer are as follows: To what extent does consumer brand identification influence online brand advocacy among online travel agency (OTA) website users through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement?

To address this research question, the study employed a quantitative approach utilizing a self-administered online survey for data collection. Valid and reliable pre-existing scales were used as measurement instruments. The survey targeted Dutch nationals and residents of the Netherlands. Data analysis was conducted using Simple Linear Regression and the Process Macro tool in IBM SPSS statistics.

The findings revealed that OTA users who strongly identify with a brand are more likely to engage with the platform, which ultimately leads them to become advocates of the platform. Interestingly, there was also evidence that users who did not frequently engage with the brand still performed advocacy actions online. This suggests that while consumer brand engagement enhances the likelihood of online brand advocacy, it is not an exclusive requirement for advocacy behavior. Consequently, all hypotheses tested in this study were accepted.

These results underscore the importance of fostering a strong consumer brand identity to enhance brand advocacy. The study contributes to the understanding of how engagement and identification interact to influence consumer behavior in the digital context of online travel agencies. Future research could further explore the nuances of these relationships in different demographic and cultural settings, and among various types of brands.

KEYWORDS: *online brand advocacy, consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement, online travel agencies, OTA*

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1 Introduction

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly urged individuals to resort to online purchases due to enforced global lockdowns and social distancing measures implemented to control its spread (Gu et al., 2021, p. 2263). Consequently, this hastened the comprehensive advancement of digital commerce, encompassing the tourism industry, and substantially increased the utilization of the internet and mobile phones among consumers (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1977; Martin-Fuentes & Mellinas, 2018, p. 465). This evolution is particularly evident in the digitally immersed behaviours of tourists (Villamediana et al., 2020, p. 1).

The primary aim of this research is to investigate online brand advocacy (OBA) among online travel agency (OTA) users. Online brand advocacy is the strong online representation of a brand by a previous or existing customer that is influential, purposeful, deliberate, non-incentivized, and often in the brand's best interest. It originates from the social exchange theory (SET), which helps link consumer attitudes to voluntary behaviours (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 1164). On the other hand, OTAs are platforms that aggregate services provided by various travel and tourism-related companies (Talwar et al., 2020, p. 2). Popular OTAs include Booking.com, Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Agoda.com, Trivago, and Airbnb.

The transformative shift in travel behaviours has evolved passive consumers into active participants who design their own travels (Buhalis & Park, 2021, p. 4). According to a TGM global travel survey report (2023, p. 4), 40% of consumers worldwide learn about new destinations through travel websites, indicating extensive use of digital methods in travel planning. In Europe, 59% of travel arrangements are made by travellers themselves, with 70% of bookings made via the internet (p. 12-15). This shift demonstrates a move towards self-reliant travel planning, where consumers actively use digital means for research and bookings rather than relying on travel agents (García et al., 2022, p. 370; Villamediana et al., 2020, p. 1; Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1977; Gu et al., 2021, p. 2263; Aksoy & Yazici, 2023, p. 1). These changes make the study of OTAs particularly relevant.

This research aims to analyse whether users of OTAs who identify with a specific platform are likely to advocate for that platform online. Additionally, the study will test whether OTA users who identify with a specific platform are also likely to engage with the

brand and whether this engagement leads to online brand advocacy. Finally, the research will explore if the relationship between consumer brand identification (CBI) and online brand advocacy for their preferred platform is mediated by consumer brand engagement. OBA is a multidimensional construct where consumers actively promote, support, or defend a brand within the online environment (Wilk et al., 2019, p. 416). The digital age recognizes brand advocates as the most proficient marketers (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 2). To influence OBA, technology has enabled both travellers and OTAs to collaboratively shape distinctive travel experiences (Buhalis & Park, 2021, p. 4). OTAs need to connect with consumers in a way that individuals incorporate the brand into their self-concept, viewing themselves and the brand as one social entity, a concept known as consumer brand identification (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2020, p. 137). This strong relationship can significantly impact potential customers' purchasing decisions and shorten their decision-making journey (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 2; Wilk et al., 2019, p. 417).

Prior research shows a positive correlation between OBA and CBI. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 407) define CBI as the state of oneness a consumer feels with a brand. The more an individual identifies with the brand, the more likely they are to engage in positive online conversations to promote, recommend, and defend the brand (Kaur et al., 2020, p. 3). Consumer brand engagement is defined as a psychological state resulting from interactive and co-creative experiences between a customer and the brand in specific service relationships (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 260). Initially, these engagement levels are low but develop under favourable contextual conditions that heighten the consumer's sense of belonging with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2016, p. 255).

Ultimately, consumers who identify with a brand are also engaged in creating positive brand-related user-generated content (UGC) and are more likely to be online brand advocates. Consumers primarily rely on brand related UGC that reflects the experiences of their peers, finding it relatable and instrumental in making well-informed decisions (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1979). To investigate this further, this study formulates the following research question through the lens of social identity theory, social exchange theory and service-dominant logic (SD logic) theory: To what extent does consumer brand identification influence online brand advocacy among OTA users through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement?

Despite the widespread use of OTAs, limited research has been conducted on the topic, with most literature adopting a qualitative approach (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 254). Given the extensive use of the internet by consumers for gathering consumption-related information, purchasing products, and communication (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 351), this study aims to provide brands and marketers with a deeper understanding of online brand advocacy. The literature on OBA is limited (Wilk et al., 2019, p. 417), and although previous research shows a positive relationship between brand advocacy and CBI, the mediation effect of consumer brand engagement is rarely discussed (Kaur et al., 2020, p. 3).

To answer the research question, this study will adopt a quantitative approach, using an online self-administered survey conducted among individuals in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is chosen because 54% of consumers learn about new destinations through travel websites, 14% higher than the global average. Additionally, 73% of Dutch travellers make their own arrangements, with 81% using the internet, 14% using travel agencies, and 13% using both methods (p. 13-16). Lastly, the method of analysis that will be applied is PROCESS Macros and Regression analysis.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Online travel agencies (OTA)

The tourism and hospitality industry has experienced a steady rise in success over the years, solidifying its position as a major source of revenue within the global service sector (Rather et al., 2019, p. 197; Angeloni & Rossi, 2020, p. 728). This growth has been significantly fueled by the increasing influence of online travel agencies (OTAs). OTAs are third party distributors that aggregate the services provided by many travel and tourism-related companies onto one platform, simplifying the booking process. In other words, travelers interested in making online bookings for their forthcoming journeys do not have to make their bookings directly with each travel service provider on their respective websites, for example reserving a room directly on a hotel's website. Instead OTA's help them to make all or at least some of their travel related booking in one place. The services that OTA's provide can include purchasing airline tickets, booking hotel accommodations, renting homes, booking tours, buying attraction tickets, and arranging transportation, all through the internet (Angeloni & Rossi, 2020, p. 727; Hien et al., 2024, p. 1). Some examples of OTA platforms are Booking.com, Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Agoda.com, Trivago, and Airbnb.

One factor contributing to the success of OTA is their role as specialized providers of information, that offers complimentary tourism related details online to assist prospective guests or entice new visitors. This has been possible due to the development of information and communication technologies that have empowered customers to conveniently purchase travel and tourism products and services at their leisure (Albayrak et al., 2019, p. 50). The digital realm gives consumers unlimited access to extract information and exhibit a preference for brands that align with their personal values (Min & Lee, 2020, p. 26).

In the context of tourism, technological prowess and online consumer engagement are no longer competitive advantages, but fundamental requirements for a tourism organization (Ahmad et al., 2022, p. 197; Villamediana-Pedrosa et al., 2020, p.1). Especially since travelers frequently use online resources to gather information and read reviews about the destination they want to visit. Furthermore, they can also easily compare offerings and prices of these tourism agencies and complete transactions without being

dependent on a travel agent (Albayrak et al., 2019, p. 50). Due to these behaviors, OTA's have made significant investments in digital technologies and brand marketing strategies to distinguish themselves amidst fellow OTA platforms as well as traditional offline competitors (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, p. 52; Indihar et al., 2023, p. 20). For example, the surge in mobile device adoption and ubiquitous internet access shifted the business model of online agencies from web-based services to smartphone apps (Hien et al., 2024, p. 1; Talwar et al., 2020, p1).

OTAs account for a significant portion of tourism bookings and are a powerful force in how travel is planned and purchased (Talwar et al., 2020, p. 1). To put this in perspective, market research shows that the projected value of the European online travel market in 2024 is approximately USD 89.22 billion, with an anticipated growth to USD 131.94 billion by 2029 (Europe Online Travel Market Insights, n.d.). This growth is expected to occur at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.14% over the specified period from 2024 to 2029. These figures show the rapid rise in popularity of OTA platforms, making them an important area to study within the tourism industry.

Similarly, within academia, scholars around the globe have also been examining different aspects of online travel agencies. However, this literature is fragmented and incoherent (Talwar et al., 2020, p. 2; Zhou et al., 2024, p. 1). Early studies about OTAs mostly focused on online service quality on the platforms (Kim & Lee, 2008, p. 105; Kaynama and Black, 2000, p. 63; Van Riel et al., 2007, 475). For example, investigating the underlying dimensions of web service quality, or evaluating electronic service quality tools such as E-QUAL. Other researchers also conducted a comparison analysis between online travel agencies and online travel suppliers or among online travel agencies to understand consumer behaviors (Tsang et al., 2010, p. 306; Kim et al., 2007, p. 591; Mayr and Zins, 2009, p. 164).

On the contrary, due to its exponential growth, more recent research on OTAs have investigated the consumer experiences and behaviors. For instance, the research conducted by Agarwal et al. (2022, p.7) aimed to explore the concept of customer loyalty among members of loyalty programs by focusing on the elements that contribute to customer happiness and by analyzing aspects of the purchasing experience that make it enjoyable. This approach provided deeper insights into how positive purchasing

experiences can lead to customer satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty to a brand or service. A study by Rasmidatta (2022, p. 13- 14), examined the mediating effects of customer engagement in the relationship between service innovation and customer loyalty to uncover how service innovation can enhance customer engagement, which in turn boosts customer loyalty. While Santos et al. (2022, p. 384) studied the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty in travel agencies mediated by brand trust and satisfaction.

However, while conducting the literature review for online travel agencies the researcher did not find any research available on online brand advocacy and consumer brand identification within OTAs. The available scholarly articles focus on online brand advocacy in other contexts such as online brand communities, user-generated content, exploring tourism destinations (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 283; Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 1160; Wong & Hung, 2022, p. 343). Whereas in the case of consumer brand identifications, research was found on topics such as destination brand identification, brand identification and customer preference identification (Molinillo et al., 2022, p. 1; Rather et al., 2022, p. 1175; Bian et al., 2022, p. 1). Thus, revealing an existing gap in the literature of online travel agencies.

2.2 Consumer brand identification

According to Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 407), consumer brand identification can be defined as the state of oneness that a consumer feels with a brand. Other scholars define consumer brand identification as the degree to which consumers perceive their own self-image aligning with the image projected by the brand (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006, p. 49; Lam et al., 2012, p. 236; Popp and Woratschek, 2017, p. 253). Recent studies, define consumer brand identification (CBI) as "a cognitive state of self-categorization," where a consumer deliberately perceives a brand as reflective of their own self-concept (Wolter et al., 2016, p. 786; Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017, p. 219; Torres et al., 2017, p. 55). This research uses Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 407) definition of consumer brand identification.

In this research, CBI is posited through the lens of the social identity theory (SIT) as it has historically helped researchers to understand online consumer behaviors effectively (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1980). According to SIT, individuals have a natural inclination to fulfill

their social needs by categorizing themselves and others into social groups (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012, p. 407). Even though the consumer-brand relationship in most cases may be one sided, individuals still demonstrate a tendency to categorize themselves as a part of the brand. It can be conceptualized as an act that is 'active, selective and vocational' and is motivated by the satisfaction of one or more self-definitional needs' (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, p. 43). This is because a customer's identity can extend beyond the individual to include things like companies, brands, groups, and even other customers (Itani, 2020, p. 1024). Furthermore, as a psychological process, CBI creates consumers that are connected to the business psychologically and shapes the strength of the long-term relationship between the brand and the consumer (Büyükdag & Kitapçı, 2021, p. 2).

Brands are a reflection or representation of a certain lifestyle that encompasses the collective values, preferences, and consumption habits of a group of consumers (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, 39). From the social identity perspective, consumers utilize brands for self-definition when the brand fulfills self-motives, such as self-enhancement by positively reflecting on one's self-image (Wolter et al., 2016, p. 786). In other words, the products and services people use become a part of their identity and serve as tangible reminders of their past experiences and aspirations (Büyükdag, N., & Kitapçı, 2021, p. 2). Research also suggests that individuals are inclined to seek affiliation with organizations for identification purposes, even in instances where they are not formal members of those organizations (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012, 37).

The more a brand meets the self-motives of consumers, the more consumer brand Identification (CBI) is strengthened, leading to a psychological sense of unity with the brand, its parent company, and other consumers who use the brand. Furthermore, literature also implies that the connection between product image and perceived self-image asserts that consumers make lifestyle statements through their choices. (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 47). In other words, the products that consumers choose are often those that align with their personal self-concept or desired identity. They don't just buy and use products for functional use but are also symbols that express their personal values, beliefs, and lifestyles.

There are various ways that consumer brand identification can manifest itself (Itani, 2020, p. 1028). The deep symbolic nature of brands allows consumers to use their brand to

express their group affiliations and individual identities. This is mostly because CBI supports consumers to answer a key question about their identity, which is 'who am I?'. In other words, it helps consumer shape their self-concept or the mental image they have of themselves as a person (Itani, 2020, p. 1028). As a result of these affiliations (identification) with the group and its members, over time consumers build a psychological union, and these communities help them fulfil their social identification needs. These attributes also lead customers to engage in both positive and potentially negative behaviors related to the company (Itani, 2020, p. 1029).

In addition to the central role CBI plays in our understanding of how, when, and why brands help customers articulate their identities, it also has various imperative effects on a brand's success (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 406; Itani, 2020, p. 1029). Previous research suggests that CBI is a key driver and strong predictor of brand advocacy intentions offline as well as online, an outcome that is considered highly coveted and as the ultimate achievement in the marketing industry (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1981). Other positive outcomes include word-of-mouth, loyalty, and willingness to pay more and resilience to negative publicity (Itani, 2020, p. 1029). Lastly, studies also reveal that customer identification increases the annual spending power of customers. This is another rationale for why brands are increasingly focusing on consumer brand identification, as it enables them to attain superior outcomes compared to those achievable through other factors like satisfaction (Itani, 2020, p. 1029). Therefore, for online travel agencies to succeed, they should focus more on promoting travel experiences that link to the aspirations, emotional benefits, and self-expression needs of its customers. Marketers have also acknowledged that cultivating positive consumer brand relationships leads to increased sales, enhances loyalty, mitigates the effects of negative brand perceptions, and decreases vulnerability to price fluctuations (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, 39). That is why businesses have been consistently working to achieve building positive consumer brand relations for decades.

2.3 Consumer brand engagement

The rise of the "engagement era" has seen a fundamental shift in consumer behavior (Obilo et al., 2021, p. 635). Passivity, where consumers simply received brand messages, has given way to active engagement. Consumers are no longer satisfied with a one-way

flow of information; they now actively participate in shaping and consuming brand offerings.

Consumer brand engagement is a complex concept with various interpretations among marketing scholars (Islam et al., 2018, p. 27). This leads to different ways of measuring engagement. According to Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254), Consumer engagement behaviors extend beyond mere transactions and can be specifically defined as a customer's actions directed towards a brand or firm, beyond making purchases, driven by underlying motivational factors. Others, like Dijkmans et al. (2015, p. 59), consider both, how familiar a consumer is with a brand's online presence and how they actively follow those activities. Over 40% of academic literature and business practices define engagement as a unidimensional concept that focuses on either its emotional, cognitive, or behavioral aspects (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 254). However, this simplistic approach does not adequately reflect the richness of its conceptual scope. Therefore, this research focuses on consumer brand engagement (CBE) from a multi-dimensional perspective, which is also the most common approach.

The multi-dimensional concept this study follows has three-parts that investigate a consumer's thoughts towards a brand (cognitive), their feelings towards it (affection), and their engagement and interaction levels (activation) (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 152). Additionally, this study adopts Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 152) comprehensive three-dimensional framework of engagement to delve into cognitive processing, affection, and activation, to effectively represent the core aspects of thought, feeling, and action in consumer brand engagement. Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 154) defines the first dimension 'cognitive processing' as, "a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction". This is essential because the way a consumer think and process information about a brand can shape their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions towards the brand itself (Algharabat et al., 2020, p.11).

The second dimension, 'affection' is defined as, "a consumer's degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Relating to this context, brand that succeed in forming strong emotional connections with their consumers can positively influence CBE, for example by creating emotional connections and fostering loyalty towards the brand (Algharabat et al., 2020, p.11).

The third dimension, 'activation' is defined as, "a consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction" (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). To elaborate, brands can increase consumer engagement and interaction levels with a brand by increasing their online participation, involvement, and interactions with the brand (Algharabat et al., 2020, p.11).

This research analyses CBE through the lens of the service-dominant (S-D) logic. According to the service-dominant (S-D) logic, service is considered the primary foundation of all economic exchange. This perspective conceptually aligns with that of consumer brand engagement (CBE) that focuses on the consumers interaction and relationship with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2016, p. 165). Ultimately, both emphasize on the importance of service and active engagement in creating value in exchanges between consumers and brands. The S-D logic is characterized as the utilization of specialized competencies (i.e., operant resources such as knowledge and skills) through actions, processes, and performances, aiming to benefit either another entity or the entity itself. Through this perspective, engaged customers actively invest higher levels of resources in specific interactions and are essentially delivering service and creating value. Therefore, consumers are not just regarded as value co-creators, but they are also considered as the implementers of value creation with brands and provide valuable information, ideas, and knowledge for brands (Cheung et al., 2021, p. 3)

Lastly, it is important to differentiate consumer brand identification (CBI) from consumer brand engagement. CBI is centered around a consumer's sense of connection with a brand, while consumer brand engagement refers to "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790). Unlike CBI, consumer brand engagement does not inherently imply a personal connection with the brand. Additionally, CBI is distinct from the concepts of brand personality and brand identity, as these concepts do not consider the consumer's perspective of identification with the brand (Sihvonen, 2019, p. 7).

2.4 Online brand advocacy

Online brand advocacy (OBA) is a recent phenomenon that stems from the broader concept of brand advocacy (Aksoy & Yazici, 2023, p. 1). OBA can be defined as a complex, purposeful, and multidimensional construct that could be simultaneously positive or negatively valence (Wilk et al., 2019, p. 416). It is the strong online representation of a brand by a previous or existing customer that is influential, purposeful, deliberate, non-incentivized, and often in the brand's best interest. It originates from the social exchange theory (SET), which helps link consumer attitudes to voluntary behaviors (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 1164). In this context, consumers are anticipated to support the brand by speaking favorably about it, expressing their admiration, sharing brand-related information, and using positive virtual expressions like smileys.

SET posits that the relationship between consumers and brands is viewed as a social exchange, where consumers reciprocate by providing favorable and positive feedback to the brand in return for personal benefits or feelings of gratitude (Obilo et al., 2021, p. 635). In other words, when customers receive particular benefits from their relationship with a brand, they are likely to respond with positive emotions, behaviors, and thoughts, expressed through actions (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 1164).

In comparison to brand advocacy, the online environment in the case of online brand advocacy (OBA) possesses distinctive characteristics that enable consumers to network virtually and share information on online platforms through its easy accessibility and limitless global reach (Wong, 2023, p. 5). Furthermore, its immediate and lasting nature of online communication allows online brand advocacy to be recognized and responded to almost instantly, thus shortening the consumer learning and decision-making process. Advocates provide specific and in-depth knowledge about the brand, promote, support, and defend the brand in the face of criticism through user-generated content (UGC) (Wilk et al., 2019, p. 416). This also enables organizations to expand their reach outside of their immediate sphere of influence (Wilk et al., 2018, p.2).

Wilk et al. (2018, p.110) found that online brand advocacy exhibits cognitive and emotional characteristics often reinforced by virtual visual cues. Wilk et al. (2019, p. 94) delved deeper into this phenomenon, providing a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the unique aspects of online brand advocacy. In 2020, Wilk et al. further

advanced their understanding by developing and testing a four-dimensional scale encompassing brand defence, brand positivity, brand information sharing, and virtual positive expression (p. 424).

This study analyses OBA through four factors: brand defence, brand positivity, brand information sharing, and virtual positive expression (Wilk et al., 2019, p. 422). Brand defence can take place when a consumer proactively or reactively defends and stands up in the best interest of the brand. Whereas brand positivity can be identified when a consumers' communication about a brand is favourable and positive, or they endorse them. While brand information sharing is when consumers provide information about the brand that is shrewd and relevant, it also involves their online astuteness about a brand's intricate details. Lastly, virtual positive expression is the virtual visual manifestation of the consumer in support of the brand.

2.5 Hypothesis development

The stronger the identification between the brand and the consumer the more likely they are to perform loyalty actions, such as advocacy (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1981). Previous research suggests that CBI is a key driver and strong predictor of brand advocacy intentions offline as well as online. Online brand advocacy is an outcome stimulated by CBI, that is considered highly coveted and as the ultimate achievement in the marketing industry. This is because CBI stimulates the brand-related actions taken by advocates, such as engaging in positive and collaborative behaviours, investing substantial effort in supporting the brand, enhancing brand commitment, and resisting the inclination to switch to other brands (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1978-1981). Furthermore, previous research on offline methods, discovered that individuals who felt a sense of identification with a brand were more prone to exhibit loyalty and advocate for the brand (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017, p. 1257; (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 406). This indicates that these consumer-brand relationships are likely to extend to online environments.

Based on the above discussion, in the context of online travel agencies (OTAs), it can be assumed that users who strongly identify with a specific OTA platform are likely to become online brand advocates of the platform. OTAs identify themselves as the providers of specialised travel-related information and service that is efficient, reliable, and

transparent (Angeloni and Rossi, 2020, p. 728). On the other hand, today's digitally savvy travellers are searching for a reliable channel that tracks service quality of travel service providers as well as an efficient and convenient way to make their travel bookings. For example, consumers can freely compare the services offered by service providers on the OTA platform or read reviews from consumer who used the service prior. Therefore, if a consumer identifies with the service quality of a specific OTA and find it reliable, convenient, and efficient, they are likely to advocate for it online. Thus, we propose that:

H1: Consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) has a positive influence on online brand advocacy.

Although limited, but research on CBI suggests that individuals who strongly identify with a brand are more inclined to reciprocate favours to the brand and participate in various supportive behaviours compared to those with lower brand identification (Yoshida et al., 2021, p. 484). These behaviours include repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, resistance to brand switching, and willingness to pay a price premium. In other words, consumers who highly identify with the brand tend to be more actively engaged in brand-related discussions (Kaur et al., 2020, p. 3). Research conducted by Rather et al. (2018, p. 334) suggested that in order to strengthen consumer brand identification which further also impacts consumer brand engagement, brands have to ensure that the values comprising in their identity also serve the interpersonal goals of the consumers. In relation to this study, as discussed above, if OTA platforms facilitate consumer to accomplish their self-identity needs and goals, it would further strengthen the relationship between the two (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, p. 43). Therefore, if OTA platforms consistently work on building a brand image that matches with the identity of its consumer, engagement levels with the brand among OTA users is expected to increase as well (Rather et al., 2018, p. 334). Combining all the considerations discussed above, the following is hypothesized:

H2: Consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) has a positive influence on consumer brand engagement.

Engaged consumers are more likely to become brand advocates, recommending and promoting the brand to others (Harrigan et al., 2020, p. 349). Businesses strive to build strong, long-term relationships by enhancing consumer engagement (Aljarah et al., 2022, p.

1174). Behaviors such as seeking brand-related information, following online updates, participating in marketing activities, and making recommendations are key indicators of this engagement. In this digital age, when customers are confronted by numerous choices in their buying decisions, brand advocates emerge as the most effective marketers (Aljarah et al., 2022, p.2). Essentially, engaged customers become brand advocates that recommend the brand to others (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1977). Therefore, consumer engagement appears to be a key driver of brand advocacy. Studies across industries, including tourism, show that engagement fosters positive brand attitudes and loyalty. Psychology further explains this by suggesting increased engagement heightens the motivation behind these positive feelings. The reasoning described above prompts the following hypotheses:

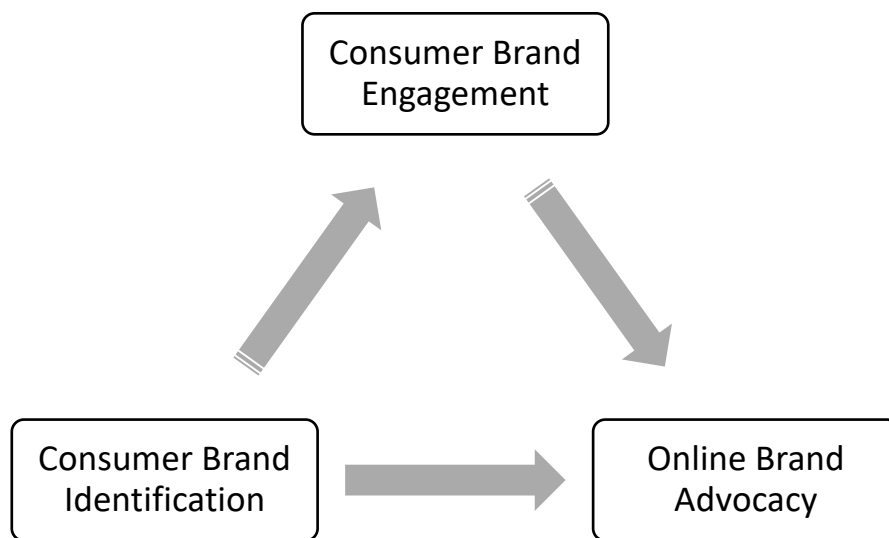
H3: Consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) has a positive influence on online brand advocacy.

Brands play a crucial role in facilitating enduring connections between businesses and their consumers that can enhance one's self-identity and ultimately their self-esteem (Büyükdağ & Kitapçı, 2021, p. 2). This is because brands represent not only a lifestyle but also shared values, tastes, and consumption patterns among consumers. Additionally, items, objects, or brands integrated into a consumer's daily activities can serve as the reflection of an individual's identity, contributing to their uniqueness and influencing their memories. That is why, CBI is referred as the self-expression of an individual as it can help them express who they are. However, at the beginning of this journey, the level of engagement from the subject is relatively low and tends to increase gradually over time, especially under certain favourable contextual conditions that enable the consumer to feel a sense of belonging with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2016, p. 255). This progression is facilitated by specific positive interactions that enhance an individual's engagement levels through particular interactions. The more an individual identifies with a brand the more likely there are to engage in co-creating value. This engagement can generate a sense of psychological ownership toward the brand, and therefore, motivating consumers to safeguard and defend the brand against competitors (Harrigan et al., 2020, p. 349). Subsequently, the more a consumer engages with the brand they more likely they are to advocate for the brand (Aljarah et al., 2022, p. 2). Brand advocates are considered the best possible marketers and can provide other consumers with trusted recommendations.

Therefore, based on the above discussion, it is believed that the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy is mediated by consumer brand engagement and the following was hypothesized:

H4: The relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy is mediated by consumer brand engagement.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of method

The purpose of this research is to understand the extent to which users of online travel agencies identify with a specific platform, and if identification with their preferred OTA platform influences them to advocate for the brand online. Furthermore, this study analyses if consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy. Driven by the research questions' focus on the need to identify and assess the causes that influences online brand advocacy (outcome), a quantitative online survey approach was selected. An elaboration on the reasons behind this choice are discussed as follows.

Firstly, quantitative research is employed to test hypotheses, thereby shaping, and directing the focus of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 227). Hypotheses are predictions that researchers' make about the expected outcomes of relationships among variables. These outcomes are numerical and can be quantified. They can measure how much of something there is, determine the duration of an occurrence, explain the reasons behind it, and potentially predict whether, or to what extent, it will occur in the future (Williams et al., 2021, p.3).

Secondly, a quantitative survey can analyse a sample of the population, enabling the researcher to extract numeric descriptions of trends, attitudes, and opinions of the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 61). This is because the data collected is generally large in sample size and is representative of the population which enables researchers to generalize their findings to a broader population (Queiros et al. 2017, p. 370).

Thirdly, quantitative research emphasizes on objective measurement and statistical analysis that reduces the influence of researcher bias and promotes data that can be replicated. For academic research, ensuring objectivity and replicability strengthens the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 51).

This research used a self-administered online survey to collect data. The reason being, that it is considered the most suitable methods for social researchers that are looking to collect original data to describe a population that would be too large to directly observe (Babbie, 2016, p. 247). The decision to do the survey online was because it is beneficial for both, the researchers, and respondents (Fielding et al., 2017, p. 3- 4). For

researchers, online surveys are a cost-effective method of data collection. They can be easily distributed to the target audience, and data can be collected and analysed rapidly as responses are automatically recorded. Online surveys also allow respondents to reach a broad and geographically diverse audience. They are highly customizable, allowing for various question types and advanced features like skip logic, which enhance the quality and relevance of the collected data (Fielding et al., 2017, p. 3- 4). On the other hand, the convenient nature of online surveys allows respondents to complete the survey at their own pace and preferred time, which can lead to higher response rates. Additionally, online surveys can provide greater anonymity, encouraging more honest and candid responses.

Overall, all these characteristics discussed above make a quantitative approach the most suitable choice for this study. Most importantly, it will allow the researcher to test objective theories by examining the relationships among consumer brand identification, online brand advocacy and consumer brand engagement (Babbie, 2016, p. 247; Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 227). When done correctly, it will limit researcher bias, ensure objectivity, and facilitate replication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 51).

3.2 Sampling and participants

To recruit participants for this study, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was conducted to thoughtfully select participants who possess specific characteristics that are relevant to the study. In purposive sampling, the selection of the observed units follows the judgement or arbitrary ideas of the researcher to find the most representative sample (Babbie, 2016a, 187). The criteria to select the participants for this study is discussed in depth below.

The first sampling criteria consisted of individuals who had prior experience of using an online travel agency (OTA) such as Booking.com and TripAdvisor to plan or make reservations for their personal or business related travels (local or international). This was important as the questions in the survey aimed to understand the participants experience with OTA platform. Therefore, without this knowledge participants would provide inaccurate or uninformed information.

The second criteria required participants to be living in the Netherlands, which includes Dutch nationals and residents. There are various reasons for choosing to conduct

this study in the Netherlands. Firstly, according to Eurostat (2023), the Netherlands is the second largest country in Europe (after Norway) in online shopping. Secondly, it has high internet penetration (Kemp, 2023). As of 2023, 95% of the total population were internet users, out of which, more than 90% of the internet users used online services to purchase goods and services for their personal use (Kemp, 2023; Eurostat, 2023). Thirdly, according to a TGM (2023, p. 16) survey, which is the world's largest survey on consumer travel behavior, revealed that in the Netherlands 81% of the people prefer to make their travel arrangements through the internet or travel specific websites. Therefore, the advanced digital infrastructure within the country, high engagement in online shopping, widespread internet usage and, the preference for making travel arrangements online makes the Dutch nationals and residents an ideal country to study the behavior of online consumer, as it would provide a representative sample.

The third criteria for this study was age, which included participants that were 18 years old and above. According to a TGM (2023, p. 13) report that surveyed respondent between the ages of 18 to 64 years found that the older generation in the Netherlands relied on travel agency websites to gather travel information as they believe that this approach is more curated and guided. It also revealed that 54% of respondents between the ages of 55-64 years of age preferred to travel with their partners over their families (31%) or friends (8%) (TGM, 2023, p. 16). This information reveals that travel is not restricted to age and proves that the older generation is also actively using online resources while making travel decisions.

To identify potential participants, the researcher created posts on various online platforms, including travel forums, social media groups dedicated to travel enthusiasts on Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit. In addition to this, the researcher also contacted respondents in-person by standing at busy locations around the city, mostly Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The survey was distributed between 17th April to 11th May 2023. A total of 380 individuals were contacted. Out of which 288 respondents were approached in-person at different locations in the Netherlands such as the public library and busy areas around the City Centres. It is also important to note here that the participants that were approached in-person were offered an incentive (a candy) after they were informed about the purpose of the study and agreed to participate.

The additional 92 respondents were reached through online platforms, including social media and community forums. Respondents accessed the survey either through an anonymous link or a quick response (QR) code that directed them to the survey created on Qualtrics. Before starting the survey, respondents were informed about the focus of the study, which was to understand the perspectives and preferences of active users of online travel agencies. Ethical considerations, including the participant privacy and informed consent, were also strictly adhered to throughout the survey administration process.

Out of the 380 respondents that were approached, 206 respondents (54%) completed the survey, while the remaining participants either refused to participate, did not respond, or did not successfully complete the survey. In terms of age distribution, 71.4% of respondents were aged 18-25, 19.1% were aged 26-35, and 8.4% were aged 36-50 ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 7.58$). The gender composition included 66.7% female and 29.5% male respondents. Educationally, 22.7% of respondents held a master's degree, 41.5% held a bachelor's degree, and 23.7% had a secondary or high school diploma. Regarding income, 64.7% of respondents reported a gross yearly salary below 30,000 Euros, while 14.9% reported a salary of 40,000 Euros or above. Additionally, 53.6% of respondents were Dutch nationals.

The following section discusses the consumer OTA usage frequencies. When respondents were asked what they used OTA platforms for in general, 54.1% completely agreed and 30.9% somewhat agreed that they used the platform to search; 44.4% completely agreed and 33.4% somewhat agreed that they used the platform for comparing; 49.3% completely agreed and 31.4% somewhat agreed that they used the platform to make bookings and 28.0% completely agreed and 32.4% somewhat agreed that they used the platform to make hospitality payments. These results showed that the survey respondents used OTA platforms prior to the travel to search for travel related information and to make booking.

When consumer were asked about their preferred OTA platforms, 21.7% completely agreed and 43% somewhat agreed that it provided the best value for the services; 39.6% completely agreed and 42% somewhat agreed that it provided comprehensive and detailed information; 39.6% completely agreed and 41.5% somewhat agreed that it provided trusted reviews and ratings from users and 55.1% completely agreed and 34.8% somewhat

agreed that it was user friendly and easy to navigate, which enhanced the experience. These results showed that consumers were somewhat skeptical about the results they received from their preferred OTA platforms. However, majority agreed that their preferred OTA platform was user-friendly and easy to navigate.

Lastly, when asked how frequently they used OTA platforms, majority responded used it occasionally (67.1%), 16.9% used it rarely, 12.6% used it monthly. Overall, the OTA usage results from the respondent show that user mostly use the platform occasionally and are critical about the information they review.

3.3 Procedure

The data was collected through a self-administered online survey that was created with the help of Qualtrics. Although the native language in the Netherlands is Dutch, after careful consideration, the researcher decided to administer the survey in English. According to the EF English Proficiency Index, the Netherlands ranked first place in English language skills among countries where it was not considered native (NL Times, 2023, para. 1). The Netherlands has consistently ranked in the top three since the ranking's inception in 2011 and has maintained the top position every year since 2019. Therefore, to have a more representative sample of Dutch nationals and expatriates, the researcher made the decision to circulate the survey in English. Especially since results from the EF English Proficiency Index suggested that Netherlands scored "very high proficiency" scores across all age groups and in major cities (NL Times, 2023, para. 3). Additionally, the chosen survey scales were already validated in English, minimizing the need for translation and back-translation, which would have been resource-intensive. However, it is also important to note that this technique could also be regarded as a limitation.

At the start of the survey, respondents were encountered with an introduction that briefed them about the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any stage, data protection measure, and the duration of the survey (approximately 7 minutes). To move onto the next stage, participants had to accept the consent form that confirmed that they were 18 years old or older, had read all the necessary terms mentioned in the introduction and agreed to participate in the research.

In the second stage of the survey, participants had to answer questions to confirm that they fit the target audience criteria. Respondents had to answer a total of 4 questions. The first question inquired whether the respondent lived in the Netherlands. While the second question confirmed whether the participant was currently or had previously used an online travel agency (OTA). To avoid any misunderstanding, OTA were defined as “online platforms that provide services relating to tourism such as buying an air ticket, renting an accommodation, booking tours, buying attraction tickets, and transportation, etc. through the internet such as Booking.com and Trivago” (Hien et al., 2024). Participants had to select between ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to answer both questions. The participants that selected ‘no’ were automatically directed to the end of the survey. The third question asked participants to specify their preferred OTA brand through a drop-down list of forty-one options, such as Booking.com, Trivago, Airbnb and Expedia. The full list of OTA brands mentioned in the survey can be found in the appendix. The last question was open-ended and allowed participants to enter the name of their preferred OTA in case they selected ‘other’ in the previous question. It’s also important to note here that to avoid unanswered questions, all questions were mandatory to answer. The respondents that met the target group were directed to a page that said ‘Thank you for your answers. Congratulations! You meet the target group criteria.’

The next section included questions to understand the consumer OTA usage patterns. Before respondents could answer, they were informed that the purpose of this section was to understand their experiences. This section had three questions that are described below. The first question in this section inquired about what participants generally use OTA platforms for, with answer options including searching, comparing, booking (i.e. the ability to make reservations and payment upon arrival at the destination) and, paying for hospitality services (i.e. the process of completing payment transactions for the accommodations or services booked in advance) (Hien et al., 2024, p. 2). Participants had to answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree and 5= completely agree). The second question inquired why participants use their preferred OTA platform in comparison to others. The answer options were: ‘it offers the best value for the services (i.e. buying air ticket, renting accommodation etc.) it provides’, ‘it provides comprehensive and detailed information’, ‘it provides trusted reviews and ratings from users’, and ‘it is

easy to navigate and user-friendly, which enhances the booking experience' (Hien et al., 2024, p. 2). Participants answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree and 5= completely agree). The last question in this section asked how often they use OTA platforms. To indicate the frequency, respondents selected from 'daily', 'weekly', 'monthly', 'occasionally', 'rarely' or 'never'.

It is also important to mention here that at the start of the survey, participants were asked to name their most preferred OTA and to keep this brand in mind while answering the question. This was repeated in several sections of the survey to encourage the respondents to think about their relationship with the brand and have responses that were focused on their preferred OTA i.e. Booking.com than responses that were about OTA in general.

The fourth, fifth and sixth section of the survey focused on practical and previously tested scales to investigate the relationship between consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement, and online brand advocacy, simultaneously (Babbie, 2016, p. 249; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Wilk et al., 2019; So et al., 2012). Existing scales were used as they help researchers avoid a chief shortcoming of close-ended questions that could occur in the structuring of responses that may overlook some important responses. Also, due to the flexible nature of surveys, all the three scales were assessed in one study (Babbie, 2016, p. 279).

The last section of the survey was intended for participants to answer questions about their demographics, such as their, age, nationality, gender, education level, and yearly gross income to understand the consumers' social and economic status. Similar to the previous sections, respondents were meant to answer these questions based on the answers provided.

Overall, the survey mostly consisted of close-ended questions, that required respondents to select their answers from a list as it provides a greater uniformity of responses, is directly transferable onto computer formats, and is more easily processed than open-ended ones (Babbie, 2016, p. 247). Finally, the respondents that answered all the questions were directed to the final page, which consisted of a message that thanked them for their participation and allowed them to leave their concerns relating to the survey in the open dialog box or through the email address provided.

3.4 Operationalization

The overall aim of this study is to test if consumer brand engagement plays significant role in the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy (OBA) among users of online travel agencies (OTAs). To measure the key constructs discussed above, conceptual models were used from established scales that demonstrated reliability and validity in prior research. The details for each construct are discussed below.

The first construct, consumer brand identification, was measured using the consumer brand identification scale, that was constructed by Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 412). It was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale where the value of 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. The scale consists of 5 items and captures the perceived brand identity as well as the self-identity of the consumer. The scales include questions such as, 'I feel a strong sense of belonging to this brand', 'I identify strongly with this brand', 'This brand embodies what I believe in', 'This brand is like a part of me', and lastly, 'This brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me'. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 412) conducted a multitude of iterative analyses (including alpha, ITTC, EFA, and CFA) that revealed these 5 items best represent CBI from a list of 15 potential items that were based on previous literature and two pilot studies. This research uses this scale to analyse the relationship between the respondent and their preferred OTA platform, to investigate their perception about the brand's identity and whether this matches with their own.

Similarly, consumer brand engagement was assessed using the consumer brand engagement scale constructed by Hollebeek et al. (2014, 156). It was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale where the value of 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. The scale consists of 3 dimensions.

The first dimension is cognitive processing and consists of 3 items. These include 'Using [brand] gets me to think about [brand]', 'I think about [brand] a lot when I'm using it', 'Using [brand] stimulates my interest to learn more about [brand]'. This dimension would enable the researcher to understand how OTA users process information while interacting with the brand (Lourenco et al., 2022, p. 2).

The second dimension is affection, which has 4 items. These include 'I feel very positive when I use [brand]', 'Using [brand] makes me happy', 'I feel good when I use

[brand]' and 'I'm proud to use [brand]'. The second dimensions will provide evidence of passionate emotions that a consumer's might feel towards their preferred OTA platform during their interactions with the brand (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022, p. 234).

The third dimension is activation, and it has 3 items. It includes 'I spend a lot of time using [brand]', compared to [category] brands, 'Whenever I'm using [category], I usually use [brand]' and '[brand] is one of the brands I usually use when I use [category]'. This would reflect the level of energy, effort, and the time a consumer spends on the OTA platform during consumer-brand interactions (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022, p. 232).

Overall, the CBE scale would provide better insights into the psychological state of the consumer and their behavioural manifestations that occur when OTA users and the platform integrate their resources and interact with each other through various service channels (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022, p. 229). It is also important to note here that in the survey each item would be slightly adjusted to adapt the research, for example, 'Using the above mentioned brand gets me to think about it' to direct the respondent to answer the questions keeping their preferred OTA platform in mind.

Finally, online brand advocacy was gauged through the Online brand advocacy (OBA) scale, constructed by Wilk et al. (2019, p. 424). It was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale where the value of 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. This scale has four dimensions.

The first dimension is brand defence and consists of 6 items. These include, 'Defend the brand when others talk it down', 'Stand up for the brand when others talk negatively about it', 'Talk up the brand when others talk negatively about it', 'Defend the brand if I hear someone speaking poorly about it', 'Try to convince others to buy from the brand', and 'Talk about the good points of this brand. These items would help reveal if the OTA user possesses the OBA characteristic of defending the platform when others talk adversely about it (Wong, 2023, p.5).

The second dimension is brand positivity and consists of five items. These include, 'Say positive things about the brand', 'Mention I am happy with its performance', 'Talk about the brand favourably', 'Say the brand is great', and 'Express my fondness for the brand'. Like the first dimension, these questions would reveal if the user talked positively about the platform (Wong, 2023, p.5).

The third dimension is brand information sharing which consists of four items. These include, 'Provide details about upcoming promotions and available discounts for the brand', 'Provide extra details about the brand (e.g. price, store locations, availability of discounts or a link to a website)', 'Share information about available or upcoming promotions (discounts) for the brand', and 'Provide lengthy explanations as to why the brand is better than other brands.' This dimension will be used to understand the extent to which the user preserves the brand by sharing relevant information about their experiences or personal stories in relation with the platform (Wong, 2023, p.5).

The fourth dimension is virtual positive expression and has three items. 'Use emoticons or emojis, such as smileys or winks.', 'Use smileys', 'Use visual symbols (e.g. emoticon, emoji, exclamation or capital lettering).' This dimension will assess if the OTA platform user has utilized visual symbols in their online expressions of conviction and enthusiasm concerning the platform (Wong, 2023, p.5). Similar to the CBE scale, the items of the OBA scale were also adjusted in the survey to meet the requirements of the research, for example, 'Defend the brand when others talk it down' was changed to 'I defend the above mentioned brand when others talk it down.'

Overall, the respondents were presented the scales in a standardized manner to maintain consistency across the survey instrument. Detailed information about the scales, including their origins and properties, can be found in the works of the original authors (Stokburger-Sauer et al.,2012; Wilk et al.,2019; So et al., 2012).

3.5 Validity and reliability

The following section addresses the measures taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. In this study, the researcher attempted to fragment and delimit the phenomena into measurable categories to ensure replicability or repeatability of the result (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). For instance, the scales used for all three constructs (consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement and online brand advocacy) are made up of standardized measure that are inclusive of varying perspectives and experiences but also had a predetermined response categories that had an assigned number (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, p. 412; Hollebeek et al., 2014, 156; Wilk et al., 2019, p. 424; Golafshani, 2003, p. 598).

The scales are pre-existing and considered valid and reliable in various research, which demonstrates that the measuring instrument is reliable and a good fit for the survey (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 250). In this context, reliability refers to the consistency or repeatability of the measuring instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 250). Additionally, the procedure mentioned in the operationalization section above was followed consistently to investigate the research question and its constructs.

The analysis started with a Factor Analysis (FA); a method generally used at the early stages of a research (Pallant, 2016, p. 202). The aim for factor analysis is to take large sets of variables or scales items and condense them into dimensions or factors that are more manageable (Pallant, 2016, p. 123). IBM SPSS does this by finding underlying patterns of correlation and items that are closely related and summarizes them into groups.

Researchers commonly use this technique to identify underlying structures during the development of scales and measurements. This study employed FA to investigate the interrelationships among the variables that were potentially associated with each of the constructs (in this case, consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement, and online brand advocacy) of this study. This technique would unveil hidden patterns in the data by grouping variables that exhibit strong correlations. Furthermore, by applying FA, the research aimed to identify a smaller set of latent factors that might explain the complexities influencing consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement, and online brand advocacy, independently.

To test the reliability of the measurement instruments, a Cronbach's coefficient alpha was computed for each scale, assessing the internal consistency of the items (Pallant, 2016a, p. 22). In other words, a measurement instrument that consistently reflects the constructs that are being measured, whether it is considered reliable (Field, 2017, p. 1,189). A Cronbach's alpha is also considered the most common measure of scale reliability. As a robust Cronbach's alpha value serves as an indicator of the reliability and homogeneity of the scales used in the study (Pallant, 2016a, p. 22). In this research, a reliability test was conducted for each scale (consumer brand identification, consumer brand engagement, and online brand advocacy) independently.

Finally, the results for all the scales tested for internal reliability and exposed to a factor analysis are discussed follows.

Consumer brand identification: The 5 items were entered into a factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .86$, $\chi^2 (N = 206, 10) = 733.74$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 75.1% of the variance in consumer brand identification. The result of factor loadings of individual items onto the one factor, that is in line with the scale from Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012, p. 412) is presented in Table 1. The factor found was consumer brand identification: This factor encompasses a consumers' perceptions of their emotional connection and personal attachment to the OTA platform, reflecting the degree to which consumers identify with the platform as an integral part of their self-concept and values.

Table 1. Factor loadings explained variance and reliability of the one factor found for the scale 'Consumer brand identification'.

Item	Affection
Item 1	0.89
Item 2	0.89
Item 3	0.88
Item 4	0.84
Item 5	0.83
R^2	0.75

Consumer brand engagement: The 10 items were entered into a factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .83$, $\chi^2 (N = 206, 45) = 992.56$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 71.2% of the variance in consumer brand engagement. The factor loadings of individual items onto the three factors found are presented in Table 2. The factors found were:

Affection: The first factor captures the emotional aspect of consumer brand engagement, focusing on how consumers feel positively towards the brand. It involves emotions such as happiness, pride, and overall positive feelings associated with using the brand.

Cognitive Processing: The second factor represents the mental aspect of consumer brand engagement, focusing on how consumers think about and interact with the brand on a cognitive level. It involves conscious thoughts, perceptions, and considerations related to the brand.

Activation: The third factor represents the behavioral aspects of consumer brand engagement, focusing on the level of consumer activity and usage related to the brand within its category. It involves the frequency and intensity of brand usage compared to other brands within the same category.

These results confirm the findings from the initial consumer brand engagement scale from Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 156).

Table 2. Factor loadings explained variance and reliability of the three factors found for the scale ‘Consumer-brand engagement’.

Item	Affection	Cognitive Processing	Activation
Happiness	0.87		
Positivity	0.84		
Satisfaction	0.82		
Pride	0.56		
Awareness		0.87	
Reflection		0.79	
Curiosity		0.75	
Preference			0.94
Inclination			0.91
Usage			0.80
R^2	0.44	0.17	0.11
Cronbach’s α	0.82	0.76	0.87

Online brand advocacy: The 18 items were entered into a factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .917$, $\chi^2 (N = 206, 153) = 3167.219$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 70.87% of the variance in online brand advocacy. Factor loadings of individual items onto the three factors found are presented in Table 3. The factors found were:

Brand positivity: The first factor included six items that related to the consumer's endorsement of their preferred OTA platform. This included estimations of the consumer's favorability, greatness, satisfaction, positivity, fondness, and promotion.

Positive behavioral expression: The second factor included seven items that related to consumer engagement with their preferred OTA platforms. This included estimations of the consumer's use of emoticons, visuals, smileys, promotion, details, information, comparison, and support.

Brand defence: The third factor included five items that relates to a consumer advocating for their preferred OTA platforms. This included estimations of the consumer's support, defence, advocacy, protection, and persuasion.

Table 3. Factor loadings explained variance and reliability of the three factors found for the scale 'online brand advocacy'.

Item	Brand positivity	Positive behavioral expression	Brand defence
Favorability	.873		
Greatness	.833		
Satisfaction	.793		
Positivity	.783		
Fondness	.670		
Promotion	.594		
Emoticons		.893	
Visuals		.890	
Smiley		.889	
Promotion		.816	
Details		.807	
Information		.776	
Comparison		.639	
Support			-.960
Defend			-.925
Advocate			-.916
Protection			-.838
Persuade			-.474
R^2	0.48	0.16	0.07
Cronbach's α	0.89	0.92	0.93

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Data preparation

Before starting the analysis, the data collected through the survey was exported from Qualtrics as an excel file and the responses were in numeric values (instead of text). This was done to meet the requirements of the analysis and to optimize the research process by eliminating the need for manual data conversion. To clean the data, the researcher

removed the following responses: preview responses, respondents that did not meet the research criteria, and respondents that failed to answer all the questions. Lastly, to have a less cluttered data set, columns that were not related to the survey questions were removed, these include, the start and end date, response type, IP address, progress, duration, finished status, recorded date, response ID, recipient name (which were blank), external data reference, location, distribution channel and user language (as the survey was only in English).

3.6.2 Analysis method

This study takes a multi-faceted analytical approach with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics to examine the relationships and mediating factors within the above-mentioned proposed research model. This research used Linear Regression and Mediation as the methods of analysis. The purpose and reasoning for both methods is discussed below.

A regression analysis was conducted to investigate hypothesis 1, 2 and 3. Regression analysis can be defined as a method used to predict a continuous dependent variable based on one or multiple predictor variables (Denis, 2018, p. 103). Put simply, this method of analysis will help the researcher to make predictions about the responses from the survey data. Furthermore, based on the theory that the researcher intended to evaluate and due to the use of a single predictor variables, a simple linear regression was employed for each of the scales independently.

Finally, to delve into the mediation effects proposed in the research model, a mediation analysis was conducted using the Process macro method (Hayes, 2022, p. 80). Mediation analysis is a statistical technique used to assess evidence from studies that aim to test hypotheses regarding how a causal antecedent variable 'X' influences a consequent variable 'Y'. In other words, this approach allows for a thorough examination of the direct and indirect effects, providing insights into the mediating mechanisms within the conceptual framework. In this study a simple mediation model was used. This decision was made based on the aim of research, which was to test if consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy. It consists of at least one causal antecedent variable (X) that influences the outcome (Y) through an individual intervening variable (M) (Hayes, 2022, p. 81). Such a

model can take two pathways where 'X' influences 'Y'. They can be found by following the path 'X' takes to 'Y', only in the direction the arrows points. The first route, called the direct effect, goes from 'X' to 'Y' without involving 'M'. The second route, known as the indirect effect, goes from 'X' to 'Y' through 'M': it starts with 'X' affecting 'M', which then affects 'Y'. In summary, the study will test if the relationship between consumer brand identification (X) and online brand advocacy (Y) is mediated by consumer brand engagement (M).

4. Results

4.1 The effects of CBI with an OTA on OBA

The first step in the analysis was to test H1, to examine the relation between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy. However, unlike most paper this research independently analysed each dimension of OBA. This approach was chosen due to the complex consumer behaviour OBA exhibits, rather than treating it as a single construct (Wong, 2023, p. 8). Additionally, a study conducted by Wilk et al. (2020, p. 424) took a similar approach in their research, while Aljarah et al. (2022, p. 1173) highlighted it as a limitation within their research, which further supports in this decision. For this study, by conducting a regression analysis separately, the research can delve deeper into the construct and get a more nuanced understanding of how CBI influences each aspect of OBA and if consumer behaviour is consistent or varies across each dimension of OBA.

Moreover, based on the results of the factor analysis, 'brand information sharing' and 'virtual positive expression' was combined into a new dimension called 'positive behavioural expression'. Consequently, in comparison to the initial OBA scale by Wilk et al. (2020, p. 242) this study has reduced the OBA dimensions from four to three - brand positivity, behavioural expression, and brand defence. Therefore, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H1a Consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences brand positivity.

H1b Consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences positive behavioural expression.

H1c Consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences brand defence.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand identification and brand positivity or H1a. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 96.14, p < .001, R^2 = .32$. Consumer brand identification was found to be a significant positive predictor of brand positivity ($\beta = 0.57, p < .001$), indicating that an increase in consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) is associated with an increase in brand positivity. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand identification positively influences brand positivity (H1a).

The second simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand identification and positive behavioural expression or H1b. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 80.04, p < .001, R^2 = .282$. Consumer brand identification was found to be a significant positive predictor of positive behavioural expression ($\beta = 0.53, p < .001$), which indicates that an increase in consumer brand identification with an OTA is associated with an increase in positive behavioural expression. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand identification positively influences positive behavioural expression (H1b).

A third, simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand identification and brand defence. The regression model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 109.14, p < .001, R^2 = .349$. Similar to the first two analysis, CBI was found to be a significant positive predictor of brand defence ($\beta = 0.59, p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in consumer brand identification with an OTA is associated with an increase in brand defence. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand identification positively influences brand defence (H1c).

Overall, as all three hypotheses were accepted, this reveals that CBI influences each dimension of OBA in a consistent manner.

4.2 The effects of CBI with an OTA on CBE

The second hypothesis was also tested through a simple linear regression to examine the relationship between consumer brand identification and consumer brand engagement. However, unlike OBA, CBE was analysed as a single construct, consistent with previous research (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 9; Riskos et al., 2024, p. 7; Fernandes and Moreira, 2019, p. 282- 283; Cheung et al., 2022, p. 2375). The regression model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 128.49, p < .001, R^2 = .389$. Consumer brand identification was found to be a significant positive predictor of consumer brand engagement ($\beta = 0.62, p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in consumer brand identification with an online travel agency (OTA) is associated with an increase in consumer brand engagement. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand identification positively influences consumer brand engagement (H2).

4.3 The effects of CBE with an OTA on OBA

The third hypothesis tested the relationship between CBE and OBA by employing a simple linear regression as well. Where CBE was used as a single construct (same as above) and each dimension of OBA was analysed independently. The new hypothesis are as follows:

H3a Consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences brand positivity.

H3b Consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences positive behavioural expression.

H3c Consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) positively influences brand defence.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand engagement and brand positivity. The regression model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 163.73, p < .001, R^2 = .445$. Consumer brand engagement was found to be a significant positive predictor of brand positivity ($\beta = 0.67, p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) is associated with an increase in brand positivity. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand engagement positively influences brand positivity (H3a).

A second simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand engagement and positive behavioural expression. The regression model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 26.73, p < .001, R^2 = .116$. Consumer brand engagement was found to be a significant positive predictor of positive behavioural expression ($\beta = 0.34, p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) is associated with an increase in positive behavioural expression. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand engagement positively influences positive behavioural expression (H3b).

A third simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between consumer brand engagement and brand defence. The regression model was found to be significant, $F(1, 204) = 83.50, p < .001, R^2 = .290$. Consumer brand engagement was found to be a significant positive predictor of brand defence ($\beta = 0.54, p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in consumer brand engagement with an online travel agency (OTA) is

associated with an increase in brand defence. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that consumer brand engagement positively influences brand defence (H3c).

4.4 The mediation effects of CBE

For Hypothesis 4, a mediation analysis was conducted to test that consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy. Based on Model 4, the aim was to test the indirect effect of consumer brand identification towards online brand advocacy through consumer brand engagement as a mediator, but also the direct impact of consumer brand identification on online brand advocacy (Hayes, 2017, p. 7). The comprehensive model was found to be significant $F(2, 203) = 102.43, p < .001$, explaining 50% of the variance in online brand advocacy, $R^2 = .50$. The results from the analysis suggest that there was a significant positive relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy without the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement $b = .88, p < .001$.

In addition, the results for the a' path indicated that the coefficient between consumer brand identification as a predictor and consumer brand engagement as an outcome was significant, $b = .68, p < .001$. The analysis revealed that for the b' path, the coefficient between consumer brand engagement as a predictor and online brand advocacy as an outcome was significant, $b = .36, p < .001$. Lastly, the direct effect of consumer brand identification on online brand advocacy including the mediator of consumer brand engagement indicated a significant direct effect $b = .63, p < .001$.

A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect based on 5,000 bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals was entirely above zero $b = .25, CI95\% [.1481, .3482]$. The findings indicated a partial mediation relationship because the direct effect remained significant after including the mediator of consumer brand engagement. This means that even if consumer brand engagement has a significant role in the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy, consumer brand identification continues to have a direct effect on online brand advocacy without the presence of consumer brand engagement.

5. Discussion

The aim and purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which consumer brand identification influences online brand advocacy among online travel agency (OTA) website users through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement.

5.1 Relationship between CBI and OBA

To answer the research question, first, the effect consumer brand identification has among online travel agency users on online brand advocacy was tested. The first relationship that was tested was if consumer brand identification positively influences brand positivity. The result from this study confirms that the higher consumer brand identification an OTA user experiences, the more likely they are to positively influence brand positivity. Wilk et al. (2019, p. 422) defines brand positivity as the favourable, positive, or endorsing communications a consumer has about a brand. This is in line with previous research that found that the stronger the identification with a brand or organization, the more likely a customer is to be satisfied with the company's offerings and services (Rather, 2018, p. 493). This increased satisfaction can lead to positive word-of-mouth, a readiness to try new products or services, and a higher tolerance for negative information related to the firm.

The second relationship that was tested was if consumer brand identification positively influences positive behavioural expression. Positive behavioural expression refers to a consumer providing insightful and relevant information with existing or potential consumers through text or with visual symbols in their online expressions of conviction and enthusiasm concerning the platform (Wilk et al. (2019, p. 422). The study confirmed that a positive relationship was identified between consumer brand identification and positive behavioral expression. These results are also aligned with prior research that stated that when a consumer has strong ties and shared mutual goals with an organization or brand the more likely they are to foster loyalty and positive interactions (Yoshida et al., 2021, 490). These common goals allow the exchange of important information, maintaining harmonious social relationships, and ultimately lead to sustained support for the organization. Whereas the use of visual expressions such as emojis are known to help users in expressing themselves and build their own identity (Bai et al., 2019, p. 4). They help

establish emotional tone, reduce ambiguity in discourse, enhance contextual appropriateness, and modify the intensity of speech acts. Additionally, emojis are used for greetings and to maintain and enhance social relationships, thereby strengthening communication on a platform.

The third relationship examined, if consumer brand identification positively influences brand defence. The results confirm that a strong consumer brand identification among online travel platform users does positively influence users to actively defend the brand. Research conducted by Parrott et al. (2015, p. 237) also revealed that brand advocates act as experts of the brand that not only voluntarily promote the brand but also defend it in the face of atrocities. In other words, as discussed earlier in this study, consumers do not simply choose brands for functional use but those that align with their personal or desired self-concept (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 47). Therefore, to be experts, consumers would have to strongly identify with the brand, which influences them to defend the brand online.

Overall, each dimension of online brand advocacy proved to be positively influenced by consumer brand identification. This means that OTA users that strongly identify with their preferred OTA platform are more likely to promote brand positivity, positive behavioural expression as well as defend the brand online.

5.2 Relation between CBI and CBE

The relationship between consumer brand identification among OTA users was also analyzed to test if it influenced consumer brand engagement. The analyses revealed a positive effect of consumer brand identification on consumer brand engagement. In other words, this means that the more a consumer identifies with a brand the more likely they are to engage with the brand online. Similarly, prior research considers consumer brand identification as a key antecedent of consumer brand engagement. Research also confirms that consumers who highly identify with a brand are more consistent with their engagement with the brand (Rather et al., 2018, p. 334).

The results showed that consumer brand engagement among online travel agency users positively influences consumer brand engagement.

5.3 Relationship between CBE and OBA

To examine the influence of consumer brand engagement and online brand advocacy each dimension of OBA was tested separately. The results are discussed below.

First, the relationship between consumer brand engagement and brand positivity was analysed. The results revealed that consumer brand engagement had a positive influence on brand positivity. This meant that the more consumers engaged with the brand the more likely they were to speak positively about it. In the case of online travel agencies consumers could participate in completing satisfaction surveys employed by the brand or leave positive reviews about their experiences on the different online forums.

The second relationship that was investigated was between consumer brand engagement and positive behavioural expression. The results were positive, which meant that CBE positively influences positive behavioural expressions. Similarly, in their research, Angeloni and Rossi (2020, p. 720) stated that travellers generally use the internet to get travel-related information and to make their travel bookings online. They also mentioned that consumers often read and write reviews about the experience with the service providers. In the case of OTA platforms, by reading and reacting to reviews of other consumers and writing reviews about their own experiences with service providers (i.e. the hotel they stay at during their vacation), the OTA user is adding to the reliability of the platform, which in turn positively affects the OTA.

Consumer brand engagement and brand defence was the third relationship that was examined and similarly to the others, CBE positively influenced brand defence. Therefore, this meant that engaged consumers were actively participating in defending the brand online. This can be critical for a brand, as advocates are considered brand experts who willingly share genuine and positive opinions about the brands (Parrott et al., 2015, p. 237). These recommendations hold unparalleled influence when individuals are deciding on a purchase. Research also shows that nine out of ten consumers trust brand advocates, while only two out of ten place their trust in online advertisements. (Aljarah et al., 2022, p.2)

5.4 The relationship between CBI and OBA is mediated by CBE.

The results of the mediation analysis revealed a direct and indirect relationship between the variables. This means that OTA users that closely identify with a brand are

more likely to engage with the platform which ultimately results into them converting into advocates of the platform. In this context, previous literature showed that CBI allows consumers to use brands to define themselves (private self) and to consider themselves as part of an in-group of people who identify with the brand (social self). The stronger the identification between the brand and the consumer, the more likely they are to engage and perform loyalty actions, such as advocacy (Wilk et al., 2021, p. 1981). However, there was also evidence that users that were not frequently engaging with the brands also performed advocacy actions online. Another assumption that was tested in this study was that individuals who strongly identify with a brand are more inclined to reciprocate favors to the brand and participate in various supportive behaviors compared to those with lower brand identification (Yoshida et al., 2021, p. 484). These behaviors include repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, resistance to brand switching, and willingness to pay a price premium. In other words, consumers who highly identify with the brand tend to be more actively engaged (Kaur et al., 2020, p. 3).

To summarize, all hypotheses tested in this study were accepted.

5.5 Academic contributions

This study contributes to the existing literature in various ways. Firstly, within the tourism industry, online travel agencies play a crucial role in its growth (Zhou et al., 2024, p. 19). This is due to the rise of digitalisation and globalisation that has allowed consumers more access to information and control over their choices. For example, consumers can do their own research, at their own time and make informed decisions while planning their travel instead of only depending on a travel agent like the past. Additionally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted into global lockdowns that were put in place to minimize its spread, pushed people to rely more heavily on online sales that further escalated the growth of the ecommerce industry. However, unlike the fast growth of the OTA's, the literature on this topic is fragmented and chaotic. This social research provides explanations of consumer behaviour, beliefs and intentions among OTA users post the pandemic (Williams et al., 2021, p.2).

Secondly, the aim of the research was to understand online brand advocacy behaviour among OTA users. Online brand advocacy can be considered a specific

dimension or subset of the broader construct of brand advocacy. Although there is an abundance of research available on brand advocacy, the literature on online brand advocacy is scarce. Furthermore, this paper analyses each dimension of OBA interdependently. Therefore, this paper not only addresses the gap in the existing literature on online brand advocacy but also contributes to the growing body of research in this area by providing new insights and empirical data specific to online travel agency (OTA) users. This research enhances our understanding of how online brand advocacy manifests, the factors that influence it, and its implications for marketing strategies in the digital age.

Lastly, to understand online brand advocacy among OTA user's this research investigates if consumer brand identification influences OBA through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement. Existing literature has confirmed that brand plays a powerful role in expressing and enhancing a consumer's identity and ultimately their life (Tuškej et al., 2013, p. 54). This paper draws on the theory that people who direct their effort, time, and attention into engaging with a brand, it becomes a part of their self-identity (Tuškej & Podnar, 2018, p. 455). In other words, consumers who strongly identify a specific OTA platform are more likely to engage with it and this influences them to become advocates for the brand online. Although there is existing research on consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy, and consumer brand engagement and online brand advocacy but during this research no such literature was found by the research that focused on the relationship between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy through the mediating effect of consumer brand engagement. This provides new insights of online consumer behaviours with the tourism and travel industry.

5.6 Managerial implications

This paper examined the mediating role of consumer brand engagement between consumer brand identification and online brand advocacy. Marketing managers and marketer in the tourism and travel industry can use the results of this study to focus on building stronger relationships with consumers that mirror the perceived or desired self-concept of consumers (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 47). In other words, marketers need to make the identity of brands more relatable to the target audiences. As the results of this study showed, consumer brand identification positively influences online brand advocacy.

This would help the brand form stronger relationships with the brand that could profit them not only in the short term but also long term (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018, p. 39). Additionally, after developing a strong consumer brand identity, marketers should use other advertising or communication tools that allow the consumer to engage with the brand (Rather et al., 2018, p. 334). As examined above, consumer brand engagement also has a positive influence on online brand advocacy. Since brand advocates are considered the best marketers, they would help the brand to recruit more customers (Parrott et al., 2015, p. 237).

5.7 Limitations and future research

Although this research provides valuable insights to marketers and industry professionals, there are also some limitations. The first limitation is that the study is only focused on people living in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has high internet penetration and ranks second in terms of online shopping in Europe (Eurostat, 2023; Kemp, 2023), which means that it is not fully representative of countries that do not have similar internet and shopping usage. Therefore, it is recommended that further researchers should not restrict the study to a single country.

The second limitations, also relates to the sample obtained which differ from the desired population in a few ways. In terms of age, the sample skewed younger with 71% of the respondents aged between 18 to 25 years. Gender representation was also unbalanced, with 66.7% female and 29.5% male respondents. The educational level of the respondents was overrepresentation of individuals with higher educational backgrounds. In the future, it is recommended to have a more representative sample.

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Appendix A

1. Survey Questionnaire

Consent Form

Dear participant,

Thank you for your participation. This research is being undertaken as part of my thesis project for the Media & Business master's program at Erasmus University Rotterdam. The survey consists of questions relating to your experience with online travel agencies, such as Booking.com and Trivago.

Please note, your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any point during your involvement. Furthermore, your personal information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The insights gathered from this survey will be utilised exclusively for my thesis research. Hence, your anonymity is guaranteed. Completing the survey takes approximately 7 minutes. If you have any questions during or after your participation, please feel free to contact me via email: Diana Nazareth (561733dn@eur.nl).

- By proceeding, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older, and that you understand the information shared above and agree to participate in this research."
 - Yes, I consent.
 - No, I do not consent.

Section 1 - Criteria

Before entering the survey, we ask you to complete the following questions to determine whether you fit the target group in terms of location, and the use of online travel agencies.

Q1. Do you currently live in the Netherlands?

- Yes
- No

Q2. Do you currently or have you ever used an online travel agency (OTA) website?

In this study, OTA websites are defined as online platforms that provide services relating to tourism such as buying air ticket, renting accommodation, booking tour, buying attraction tickets, and transportation, etc. through the internet such as Booking.com and Trivago."

- Yes
- No

Q3. What OTA platform do you currently or have you used in the past to search for or book your travel? Please select your most preferred option from the below drop-down menu.

- Agoda
- Airbnb
- ANWB Reizen (pharosreizen.nl)
- Belvilla
- BookerZzz (hotelspecials.nl)
- Booking.com

- Budget Air (Travix)
- Cheaptickets.nl (Travix)
- Corendon
- D-rt Group (d-reizen.nl)
- Easyjet
- Expedia
- Google hotels
- Hotels.com
- Hotwire
- Kayak
- KLM
- Landal Greenparks
- Lastminute.com
- Novasol
- Orbitz
- Pierre & Vacances Center Parcs Group
- Priceline
- Prijsvrij.nl
- Roompot Vakanties
- Ryanair
- Sunweb.nl (Sundio Group)
- Thomas Cook Nederland (neckermann.nl)
- Tix.nl
- Transavia Holidays
- Travelbird
- Travelocity
- Trips.com
- Trivago
- TUI Nederland
- Vacanceselect
- Vacancoleil
- Vliegwinkel.nl (Travix)
- World Ticket Center (wtc.nl)
- Wotif
- Other

Q4. If you selected “other” in the previous question, please specify your preferred OTA platform below.

<Open text>

Custom message for respondents who passed the criteria: “Thank you for your answers. Congratulations! You meet the target group criteria.”

Section 2 – OTA Usage

Q 5. "Firstly, we're interested in learning more about your OTA (online travel agency) usage. While answering the following section, please keep the preferred OTA platform mentioned above in mind.

In general, what do you typically use the above mentioned OTA platforms for? Please select all statements that resonate with your experience or views

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
Searching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comparing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Booking (i.e. the ability to make reservations and payment upon arrival at your destination)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paying for hospitality service (i.e. the process of completing payment transactions for the accommodations or services booked in advance)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 6. Why do you prefer to use the above mentioned OTA platform? Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. In comparison to other OTA platforms, it...

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
Offers the best value for the services (i.e. buying air ticket, renting accommodation etc.) it provides.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provides comprehensive and detailed information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provides trusted reviews and ratings from users	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is easy to navigate and user-friendly, which enhances my booking experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7. Please indicate how often you use your preferred OTA platform?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally (e.g., a few times per year)
- Rarely (e.g., once a year or less)
- Never

Section 3 – Consumer- brand identification

Q8. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements based on the preferred OTA brand that was selected at the start of the survey.

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I feel a strong sense of belonging to this brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I identify strongly with this brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'This brand embodies what I believe in.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'This brand is like a part of me.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'This brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4 – Consumer- brand engagement

Q9. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements based on the preferred OTA brand that was selected at the start of the survey.

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'Using the above mentioned brand gets me to think about it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I think about the above mentioned brand a lot when I'm using it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'Using the above mentioned brand stimulates my interest to learn more about it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I feel very positive when I use the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'Using the above mentioned brand makes me happy.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I feel good when I use the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I'm proud to use the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I spend a lot of time using the above mentioned OTA brand, compared to other similar OTA brands.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'Whenever I'm using OTA platforms, I usually use the above mentioned OTA brand, compared to other similar OTA brands.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'The above mentioned OTA brand is one of the brands I usually use when I use OTA platforms, compared to other similar OTA brands.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 5 – Online brand advocacy

Q12. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I defend the above mentioned brand when others talk it down.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I stand up for the above mentioned brand when others talk negatively about it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I talk up the above mentioned brand when others talk negatively about it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I defend the above mentioned brand if I hear someone speaking poorly about it.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I try to convince others to buy from the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I talk about the good points of the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q13. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I say positive things about the above mentioned OTA brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I am happy with the performance of the above mentioned OTA brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I talk about the above mentioned brand favorably.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I say the above mentioned brand is great'.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I express my fondness for the above mentioned brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I provide details about upcoming promotions and available discounts for the above mentioned OTA brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I provide extra details about the above mentioned OTA brand (e.g. price, store locations, availability of discounts or a link to a website).'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I share information about available or upcoming promotions (discounts) for the above mentioned OTA brand.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I provide lengthy explanations as to why the above mentioned OTA brand is better than other OTA brands.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15. Please indicate your thoughts on the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
'I use emoticons or emojis, such as smileys or winks to support the above mentioned OTA brand online.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I use smileys [:)] to support the above mentioned OTA brand online.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'I use visual symbols (e.g. emoticon, emoji, exclamation or capital lettering) to support the above mentioned OTA brand online.'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 6 – Demographics

Q16. What is your age?

<Dropdown menu from 18 to 50 years>

Q17. Which nationality do you belong to?

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Angola
- Argentina
- Aruba
- Austria
- Australia
- Bangladesh
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Bolivia
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Brazil
- Britain
- Bulgaria
- Cambodia
- Cameroon
- Canada
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- China
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Croatia
- the Czech Republic

- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Denmark
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- England
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Netherlands
- Honduras
- Hungary
- Iceland
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Ivory Coast
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Kenya
- Laos
- Latvia
- Libya
- Lithuania
- Madagascar
- Malaysia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Namibia
- New Zealand
- Nicaragua
- Niger

- Nigeria
- Norway
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- The Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Republic of the Congo
- Romania
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- Scotland
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sudan
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Syria
- Thailand
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- Turkmenistan
- Ukraine
- The United Arab Emirates
- The United States
- Uruguay
- Vietnam
- Wales
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

Q18. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Q19. What is the highest educational level that you have followed? This can either be an education that you completed or one that you are currently or were previously enrolled in.

- Primary school
- Secondary school / high school
- Vocational degree after high school
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD, MBA, or other equivalent
- Prefer not to say

Q20. On average, what is your gross yearly income? Please select a range that is closest to your salary.

- Lower than 30.000
- 30.000 - 35.000
- 35.000 - 40.000
- 40.000 - 45.000
- Higher than 45.000
- Prefer not to say

Section 7 - Ending

Custom message – “You have now reached the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your time and effort. Your help is highly appreciated! If you have questions or comments about this questionnaire, please list them below or contact me via e-mail (561733dn@eur.nl).

PLEASE PRESS THE BLUE ARROW BUTTON TO STORE ALL YOUR ANSWERS

<open text>