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A strategy to increase lamb meat consumption from a relationship marketing perspective

María Teresa Maza^{ab}, Keyla Alvarez^{ac} & Pilar Uldemolins^{ab}

ABSTRACT: A group of restaurants created a club around a lamb meat product to improve its promotion and achieve customers' commitment and satisfaction. The objective is to analyse the relationship between the restaurateurs and the final consumer (B2C). A structured questionnaire survey was used to collect the data. Consumers like promotional activities, but their participation is rather low depending on age. From the structural equation model, it was determined that customer satisfaction has a high influence on customer commitment to the establishment; however, promotion and recognition have a very low influence on customer satisfaction and commitment.

Una estrategia para incrementar el consumo de carne de cordero desde la perspectiva del marketing relacional

RESUMEN: Un grupo de restaurantes crearon un club en torno a la carne de cordero para mejorar su promoción, el compromiso y la satisfacción de los clientes. El objetivo es analizar las relaciones entre restauradores y consumidores (B2C). Mediante un cuestionario se ha recogido la información. A los consumidores les gustan las actividades promocionales, pero su participación es baja dependiendo de la edad. Del modelo de ecuaciones estructurales se concluye que la satisfacción de los clientes influye en el compromiso con el establecimiento, sin embargo, la promoción y el reconocimiento tienen una influencia muy baja en la satisfacción y el compromiso.

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE: Lamb meat, commitment, promotion, restaurants, satisfaction / Carne de cordero, compromiso, promoción, restauración, satisfacción.

JEL classification / Clasificación JEL: M31.

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1. Introduction

Relationship marketing was first defined by Berry (1983), from a service marketing perspective, as “the attraction, maintenance and intensification of customer relationships”. Later Morgan & Hunt (1994) proposed that relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities aimed at establishing, developing and maintaining exchange relationships (Bordonaba & Garrido, 2001).

Relationship marketing focuses on long-term win-win relationships that occur across a much wider range of the firm’s activities than transactional marketing considers. As Grönroos (1996) has pointed out, at the operational level it requires seeking direct contacts with customers, developing databases, and establishing a customer-oriented service system. It is therefore important to create value, meet expectations and leave the customer satisfied.

The application of relationship marketing allows for the promotion of long-term relationships. Through it, solid connections are generated with customers that adapt to their needs and promote fluid communication; they are also related to important aspects such as satisfaction. A satisfied customer is a strategic partner for the company, generating promotion and, to a certain extent, customer commitment to the establishment.

Relationship marketing is the paradigm where this case study is framed. A group of catering companies created a club around a traditional product, Ternasco de Aragón. Their aims were to improve the promotion of the product and obtain customers’ commitment to and satisfaction with the product and service. According to relationship marketing, companies begin to form a part of networks with the aim of maintaining long-term cooperative relationships with the other members of the network so that the benefits are greater than if they acted as adversaries.

On the other hand, the creation of the Ternasco de Aragón Club can also be framed within the concept of “club” by Sandler & Tschirhart (1980) who define it as “a voluntary group that obtains a mutual benefit by sharing one or more of the following statements: production costs; characteristics of the members; or a good characterized by excludable benefits”. These authors also point out the importance of the institutional structure and the objective function to be applied to obtain the optimal conditions of membership and provision.

Van’t Veld & Kotchen (2011) state that clubs provide their members with the benefit of reputation, and that the size of the club is also important. According to the same authors, consumers are more likely to know about a program the more companies that participate in it. The cost per company of promoting the program logo is reduced depending on the size of the program and the companies participating in it, since the participating companies share fixed costs of the program.

In this particular case, the common aim of the club was the promotion of Ternasco de Aragón lamb meat for establishments that rely on regional and traditional products. These establishments seek to identify themselves with the region to which they belong, offering traditional, innovative, and fusion options using ingredients from the region that give them a sense of identity with the place, elements that are often demanded by the local population and tourism.

The challenge of these establishments was to distinguish themselves from others and find a way to increase their competitiveness and gain market share, applying differentiation strategies by promoting the consumption and dissemination of this product in their own establishments. Some authors have pointed out that enhancing the value of regional products may boost the regional economy as well as the local gastronomic culture (Millán Vázquez de la Torre & Agudo Gutiérrez, 2010).

Promotion of quality food products can also encourage gastronomic tourism, and creating links between food brands and places through gastronomic routes is a useful strategy that provides added value to the product offered to the consumer (Millán Vázquez de la Torre & Agudo Gutiérrez, 2010). Therefore, promoting the creation of a club around the Ternasco de Aragón that brings a unified image to the product, focusing on a territory, could be a promising strategy to recover the consumption of lamb meat, which has been showing a gradual decline, and some authors have suggested investing in promotional campaigns (Rodríguez-Serrano *et al.*, 2016).

The objective of this study is twofold: on the one hand, to characterize the consumers who visit the establishments that are members of the Ternasco de Aragón Club; on the other hand, to analyse the relationship between the restaurateurs belonging to the Ternasco de Aragón Club and the final consumer (B2C) through the dimensions of promotion, commitment, and satisfaction.

In short, we will analyse, within the framework provided by relationship marketing, the relationships established in a novel promotional initiative based on a traditional product from a Spanish region. There are no precedents of initiatives of this nature, based around a traditional product, that have been studied within the framework of relationship marketing, so this work represents an original contribution.

1.1. Case study

In the region of Aragón (region of north-eastern Spain), probably the traditional meat product that most identifies the region is Ternasco de Aragón. It is a lamb less than 90 days old, fed with milk and natural cereals until it reaches a carcass weight ranging from 8 to 12.5 kg and has the distinctive protected geographical indication (PGI). This sign allows differentiating, guaranteeing, and adding value to the product through quality. The rigorous breeding process has been regulated since 1989 by the PGI Ternasco de Aragón Regulatory Council, being the first fresh meat in Spain to be protected under a PGI Quality Scheme (Club del Ternasco de Aragón, 2023).

The Ternasco de Aragón Club has its origins in an initiative in 2016, around the idea called “Territorio Ternasco de Aragón”, which aimed to create a network of member establishments in the HORECA channel with the purpose of promoting Ternasco de Aragón PGI as a differentiated quality product (Club del Ternasco de Aragón, 2023). At the beginning of 2019, the club had a total of 56 member establishments, belonging to 48 restaurants in the provinces of the region of Aragón and representing 0.3 % of the total number of restaurants.

There are some requirements to belong to this club, among which are: i) to consume Ternasco de Aragón PGI and no other lamb, on a permanent basis and to be able to demonstrate sustained consumption over time; ii) to always have one or more gastronomic proposal made with Ternasco de Aragón, PGI; iii) to submit the membership application for approval by the Ternasco de Aragón Club committee, made up of members of the marketing companies and the Regulatory Council of the Ternasco de Aragón PGI itself.

1.2. Theoretical framework

Promotion

Walker *et al.* (2007) define promotion as the tool that serves to achieve an organization’s objectives, in which it is necessary to inform and persuade the target audience and communicate with them. Through promotion, a company tries to stimulate a greater or faster purchase of specific products or services by consumers or intermediaries (Kotler & Keller, 2016). According to these same authors, the difference between advertising and promotion lies in the fact that while the former offers a reason to buy, the latter offers an incentive.

Some promotional activities provide ways to meet and track customers and potential customers. In addition, digitalization allows users to carry and share commercial content with their friends. The most important digital technology is the Internet, which is considered an ally (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

Customer commitment

Morgan & Hunt (1994) state that commitment represents a long-term orientation, based on the desire to maintain a relationship. In turn, they define commitment as “the exchange partner’s belief that the continuity of the relationship with the other party is so important that it deserves the maximum efforts to maintain it; therefore, the committed party believes that the relationship is valuable to ensure that it lasts indefinitely”.

This definition corresponds to that developed by Moorman *et al.* (1992) as the permanent desire to maintain a valued relationship.

For some authors, commitment entails the willingness to make sacrifices. Thus, for Dwyer *et al.* (1987) the willingness to make short-term sacrifices would be aimed at obtaining long-term benefits from the relationship, while for Anderson & Weitz (1992) short-term sacrifices would be necessary to maintain the relationship and trust in the stability of the relationship.

Commitments on both sides act as powerful signals of the quality of the relationship, provide the framework for trust between the parties and influence the development of shared social norms that will regulate future exchanges (Bordonaba & Garrido, 2001).

Flavián & Guinalú (2006) indicate, as several authors have proposed, that a greater customer commitment positively and significantly favours a greater loyalty to a company. This is why commitment and loyalty are intimately linked. Loyalty is defined by Kotler & Keller (2016) as a deep commitment to repurchase, or the tendency to remain a regular customer of a product or service in the future, despite situational factors and marketing efforts that could potentially cause changes in behaviour.

Customer satisfaction

Satisfaction is the set of feelings of pleasure or disappointment that is generated in a person as a result of comparing the perceived performance (or outcome) of a service or product, against the expectations it has generated for us (Kotler & Keller, 2016). If the performance falls below expectations, the customer is disappointed. If it is equal to expectations, the customer is satisfied, and if it exceeds expectations, the customer is very satisfied.

Customers form expectations about value and satisfaction, satisfied customers buy again and tell other individuals about their good experiences. Customer value and satisfaction are central to establishing and managing customer relationships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

There is a growing interest in customer satisfaction as an essential aspect in quality assessment (Mejías-Acosta & Manrique-Chirkova, 2011).

Promotion – Customer commitment

Some authors have studied the relationship between promotion and consumer commitment, which can be enhanced through advertising. Kwon *et al.* (2020) analysed the effects of marketing communications such as advertisement/promotion and social network service (SNS) content on consumer engagement, brand trust and brand loyalty. Participants in the study used a food service establishment and continued to use an SNS. Advertisement/promotion had a statistically significant positive effect on customer engagement and on brand trust. At the same time, consumer engagement and brand trust had a statistically significant positive effect

on brand loyalty. Han *et al.* (2019) investigated the role of social network services (SNSs) sales promotion in generating brand loyalty for chain steakhouses, and according to their results SNS sales promotion significantly increased loyalty and its antecedents, and *brand attachment had the greatest influence on brand loyalty*. It has been demonstrated that the higher the commitment customers have, the higher the loyalty customers show to a company or product (Flavián & Guinalú, 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Promotion – Customer satisfaction

A relationship was also found between promotion and satisfaction. Kim *et al.* (2019) studied the relationship of wine promotion, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention in a restaurant in South Korea. The results revealed that there was a positive relationship between wine promotion and customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction significantly influenced behavioural intention, with differences in the moderating roles of customers' gender and age.

Satisfaction – Customer commitment

Rashid *et al.* (2011) indicate that satisfaction and perceived quality of service influence the customer's behavioural loyalty or purchase intentions. In turn, as Kotler & Keller (2016) indicate, customer evaluations of product or service performance depend on many factors, including their loyalty to the brand. Thus, loyalty and satisfaction are closely related to each other.

The literature shows that service quality is closely related to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Pavličková, 2015; Uslu & Eren, 2020). Auapinyakul & Deebhijarn (2019) in certified Thai restaurants in the United States stated that customer satisfaction is the factor that has the strongest influence on loyalty, followed by customer expectations, service quality, image, and sensory perception, in that order. Bowden-Everson *et al.* (2013) indicated that satisfaction, trust, and delight ultimately generate customer loyalty in the restaurant industry. Nam *et al.* (2016) identified that customer satisfaction in Korean food restaurants influences customer loyalty, and satisfaction and good brand image will increase customers' intention to revisit.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Data collection

The data in this study were collected in 2019 and consist of 320 respondents (aged 18–70). After cleaning data, 203 valid surveys were obtained. The sample was recruited in restaurants belonging to Ternasco de Aragón Club, placed in the Aragón, Spain region where the Ternasco de Aragón Club project took place. Due to difficulties in terms of troubling customers, email and social networks were also

used to facilitate participation. The respondents selected in restaurants were asked to either complete a face-to-face survey or to participate through the online survey. Other participants were collected randomly through social networks and university students. Participation was on a voluntary basis.

2.2. Research instrument: Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire survey was used to collect the data. The survey method is widely used as a research procedure since it lets researchers obtain and elaborate data in an easy and effective way (Casas Anguita *et al.* 2003). Its main advantage is flexibility, since several different types of information can be gathered in numerous situations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). The questionnaire is available in Maza *et al.* (2024) –Appendix A_ Ternasco de Aragón Club Questionnaire–.

The questionnaire consisted of one filter question at the beginning, as well as one question about food consumption habits, one relative to promotion effect on customers, one related with satisfaction and commitment towards the restaurant question, and finally socio-demographic factors (age, gender, city of residence, family members, economic situation, education level and employment status).

Filter question. The objective of this question was to include only lamb meat consumers.

Food consumption habits. The goal of this block was to describe the sample and analyse change in consumption patterns. One question included items about food preparation, food consumption and health awareness using a five-point Likert scale indicating the level of agreement, from (1) totally disagree to (5) totally agree. And one question was about out-of-home consumption and its average expenditure.

Promotion effect, commitment and satisfaction are abstract phenomena and not directly observable. By combining several items to form a scale, these concepts can be indirectly measured (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The included items were measured on a scale from 1 to 5 indicating the level of agreement, from (1) totally disagree to (5) totally agree.

Promotion effect. Five items were included in the questionnaire to measure the promotion effect dimension. Specifically, three were related to the logo of Ternasco de Aragón Club, one related to the knowledge of restaurants with this type of distinctive logo and one was regarding the desire to go to a restaurant with this logo.

Customer commitment. The commitment construct was measured using five items relative to the experience of going to the restaurant, the quality–cost relationship, the desire to go to the restaurant when thinking of eating Ternasco of Aragón, feeling at home and convenience.

Customer satisfaction. Satisfaction with restaurants having the Ternasco de Aragón Club distinction is captured by measuring five observable variables. Three related to quality, one dealt with the desire to come back, and one concerned making a recommendation of these restaurants.

2.3. Sample

Two thirds of the sample live in the provincial capitals (59.4 % in Zaragoza, 4.4 % in Huesca and 2.5 % in Teruel), 15.3 % live in other towns in Aragón and 14.7 % say they are from other autonomous communities. Only 3.8 % were foreigners. In the sample, the group with a higher education level and aged 51 to 65 years old is over-represented compared to the population quota. Table 1 shows the main socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

TABLE 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

	Sample (%)	Population ^a (%)
Age range		
18 to 35 years old	33.8	25.2
36 to 50 years old	23.1	30.7
51 to 65 years old	40.3	27.0
More than 65 years old	2.8	17.1
Gender		
Female	63.4	51.0
Male	35.9	49.0
I prefer not to say	0.6	–
Education		
Compulsory education	3.4	15.6
Secondary education	6.9	30.2
Professional training	12.5	21.9
Higher education	77.2	32.3
Occupation		
Employed by others or self-employed	81.6	
Student	9.7	
Currently unemployed	4.1	–
Retired	4.7	
Financial situation		
Difficult–moderate	6.3	
Moderate	48.1	–
Moderate–good	45.6	
Household members		
1 member	10.3 %	
2 members	28.8 %	
3 members	26.9 %	–
More than 3 members	34.1 %	

TABLE 1 (cont.)
Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

	Sample (%)	Population ^a (%)
Under 18 years old		
None	73.4 %	
1	14.1 %	—
2	10.9 %	
More than 2	1.6 %	

^a IAEST (2021).

Source: Own elaboration.

2.4. Development of the empirical models

Two models have been developed to reach the objectives of this work. The first model was estimated by binary logistic regression and aimed to analyse the success of the promotion made by Ternasco de Aragón Club. The variables used to measure it were participation and liking of gastronomic promotion activities. The second model was estimated using partial least scale structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and aims to analyse the relationship between Ternasco de Aragón Club restaurants and their customers. Variables used were promotion, satisfaction, and commitment.

The first model aims to establish the factors that determine the liking and participation of customers in the possible promotional activities developed in the establishments such as contests (best tapa), promotional campaigns (eat 2 pay 1), daily specials (tapa + drink), etc. The aim is to find out how liking and participation in these activities vary according to a series of variables such as age, gender, origin, economic situation, and occupation.

A binary logistic regression model was used because it is a statistical technique that allows the testing of hypotheses or causal relationships between a dependent variable (binary or dichotomous) and a series of independent variables. In this case, the dependent variables were participation and satisfaction with gastronomic activities related to promotion in restaurants, and the independent variables were the demographic characteristics of the sample analysed.

The model [1] in this case allows us to:

- Estimate the probability of the occurrence of the event of interest (liking and participation in gastronomic activities).

- Evaluate the influence that each independent variable has on the response in the form of odds ratio (OR). An OR greater than one indicates an increase in the probability of the event to happen and an OR of less than one implies a decrease.

The model can be written as follows:

$$\log \left(\frac{p}{1-p} \right) = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \dots + b_kX_k \quad [1]$$

where p is the probability of the occurrence of the event of interest (liking and participation in gastronomic activities related to catering).

The second model aims to explore the relationship between the restaurants with the distinctive logo of Ternasco de Aragón Club and their customers. Promotion, commitment and satisfaction were selected as the constructs to describe this relationship.

Three initial hypotheses were proposed (see theoretical framework below):

H1: promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club influences commitment to the restaurant.

H2: promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club influences satisfaction with the restaurant.

H3: customer satisfaction influences commitment to the restaurant.

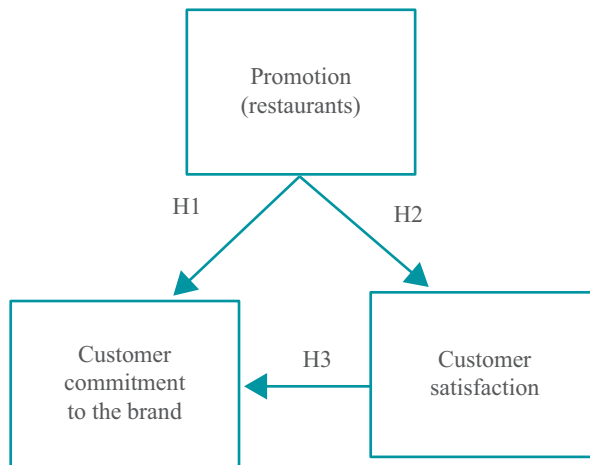
Therefore, promotion effect is used to predict commitment and satisfaction (H1 and H2), and satisfaction is used to predict commitment (H3). A diagram was created (Figure 1) to visually display the hypotheses and see the interdependence structure of the three selected dimensions. Then the theoretical model was tested using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS™ 3 software. This technique has been widely used in marketing research (Hair *et al.*, 2012) and in tourism research (Irimiás *et al.*, 2021). SEM establishes a dependency relationship between variables and reveals how a dependent variable can become independent of further stages (Escobedo Portillo *et al.*, 2016; Hair *et al.*, 2000).

The model assessment involved two stages in the evaluation process: first the measurement model and later the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Given that our model is reflective, tests were specific for it. The evaluation of the measurement model aims to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs by means of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The evaluation of

the structural model aims to evaluate the models' ability to predict, using coefficient of determination (R^2), and the level and significance of path coefficients (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The criteria used to assess the models' goodness of fit was the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (Henseler, 2018; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). The index used to evaluate effect size was f^2 (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

FIGURE 1

Theoretical model diagram of latent variables mediating restaurant–customer relationship



Source: Own elaboration.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Characterization of the consumers who visit the establishments

The first objective of this study was the characterization of the consumers that visit the establishments that are members of the Club.

Lifestyles

To estimate the lifestyle of the selected sample, a series of statements was formulated to be evaluated with a Likert scale where 1 “strongly disagree” and 5 “totally agree” (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Lifestyles and out-of-home consumption habits

	Average rating score (rating data)*	Standard deviation (rating data)*
I like to buy prepared food for my home	2.04	1.19
I enjoy going to restaurants with family and friends	3.99	1.08
I find cooking rewarding	3.66	1.18
I like to spend a lot of time cooking	2.79	1.20
I like traditional cooking	4.01	0.99
I like experimenting with new recipes	3.54	1.12
My family participates in meal preparation	3.12	1.33
I prefer to buy fresh produce rather than frozen	4.11	1.06
I always read information about what I eat	3.46	1.17
I like to take care of my health	4.19	1.00

* The rating scale ranges from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree.

Source: Own elaboration.

The highest value was obtained by the statement “I like to take care of my health” with 46.3 % of respondents totally agreeing with this statement. Next in order of importance is the statement “I prefer to buy fresh products rather than frozen”, 45.9 % agree with this statement.

Regarding “taste for traditional cuisine”, 36.3 % totally agree with this statement. According to Millán Vázquez de la Torre & Agudo Gutiérrez (2010), “changes in consumer habits have led to a growing interest in higher quality products, [...] given this increase in differentiated products [...] which integrate in their definition not only the geographical origin but also, in a relevant way, tradition”.

In the statement “I like to go to restaurants with family and friends”, 40.6 % affirm that they totally agree. This percentage is in line with the statements of Cabiedes Miragaya & Miret-Pastor (2019) that eating outside the home has been a widespread activity among Spaniards for some decades.

The mean values referring to statements related to activities such as “experimenting with new recipes”; “my family participates in the preparation of meals”; “I like to spend a lot of time cooking” and “I like to buy prepared food for my home”, are substantially lower, and the percentage of acceptance decreases.

In relation to the taste for going to restaurants, we asked about the frequency of going to establishments in the restaurant sector and 58.4 % of those surveyed stated

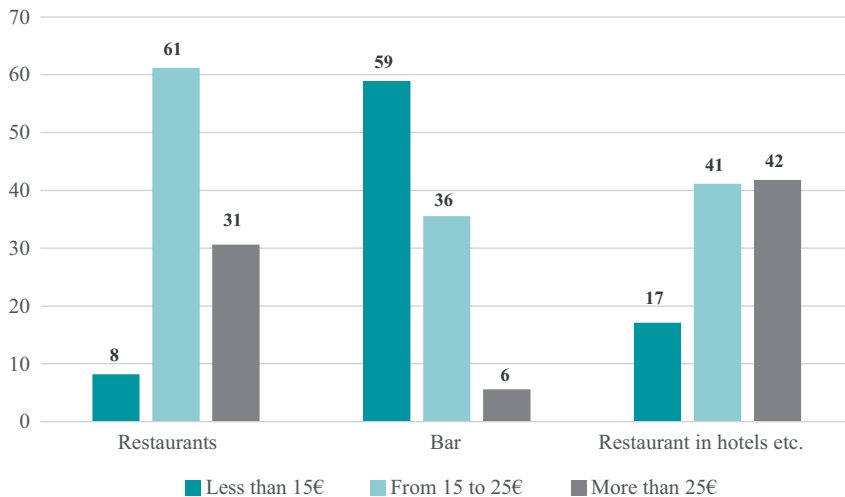
that they eat out on special occasions, 44.4 % at weekends and 22.5 % on weekdays (more than two days).

Expenditure per person eating outside the household

The highest average expenditure outside the home was in restaurants located in hotels (Figure 2). In bars, 59 % of the sample reported spending less than €15 per person and only 6 % of respondents reported spending more than €25 per person. When it comes to restaurants, 61 % of the sample reported spending between €15 and €25 and only 8 % reported spending less than €15 per person.

FIGURE 2

Expenditure per person when eating out (%)



Source: Own elaboration.

Extra-domestic consumption habits of IGP Ternasco de Aragón

Lamb meat has a relatively high consumption in the region of Aragón where the study was carried out (MAPA, 2021). In the sample analysed, 95 % of those surveyed consumed this type of meat, and 92.5 % would have consumed PGI lamb.

Table 3, shows the eating occasions when participants consume this meat, as well as the places where they eat Ternasco de Aragón. The table also reports the different consumption formats, and the percentage of individuals that prefers each of them, for example à la Carte format is the most preferred, followed by as the set Menu,

although due to the innovations being made in the product there is also a significant percentage who consume it as a tapa and sandwich. A lower proportion of the sample prefer to consume it as part of a tasting menu, in portions or at events, weddings, or special celebrations.

Regarding whether they would like to find Ternasco de Aragón PGI outside their region, more than half of the sample answered that they would, and a very low percentage answered that they would not like to find this product outside their region.

TABLE 3

Extra-domestic consumption habits of IGP Ternasco de Aragón

	Percentage of the sample (%)
Eating out home occasions	
Special occasions	58.4
Weekends	44.4
Weekdays (more than two days)	22.5
Where do you eat Ternasco de Aragón PGI?	
At home and outside the home	59.7
Only at home	22.5
Only outside the home	10.3
Consumption Formats	
À la Carte	40.3
Menu of the day	34.4
Tasting menu	17.8
Sandwiches	23.8
Tapas	25.6
Portions	14.1
Others	1.9
Would you like to find Ternasco PGI outside your region?	
Yes	79.1
No	2.8
Don't know/no answer	18.2

Source: Own elaboration.

Liking and participation in promotion activities

To estimate the effects of the promotion on the sample studied, two questions were asked about liking and participation in gastronomic activities, using five-level scales on the degree of acceptance, where 1: "I do not like it at all/never participate" and 5: "I like it a lot/participate a lot".

It is estimated that 42.2 % of respondents like promotional activities in the restaurant sector very much (3.9). On the contrary, in the case of participation in these activities, the mean value drops to 2.8 %, and only 10.9 % indicate that they participate a lot in them. Therefore, it can be inferred that the fact that these activities are liked does not determine their participation.

The effect of certain socio-demographic variables on the taste for gastronomic activities related to catering and on participation in these activities was estimated.

Using the socio-demographic variables age, gender, origin, economic situation and occupation as independent variables, an attempt was made to explain the dependent variables taste and participation in promotional activities. The dependent variables were measured on a five-level scale and were transformed into dichotomous variables, thus performing binary logistic regression analyses, the results of which are shown in the tables below.

In the proposed models using binary logistic regression, the values of the Cox and Snell R^2 and Nagelkerke R^2 coefficients of determination assume values of between 0 and 1. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test, contemplates a significance greater than 0.05 (sig. > 0.05), with which the null hypothesis is accepted. The proportion of correct classification of the sample in both models is greater than 50 %.

In the model referring to the liking of activities, the Chi-square significance in the omnibus test (Sig. = 0.034 < 0.05) indicates that the independent variables (socio-demographic characteristics) explain the dependent variable liking of activities referring to catering (Table 4).

The Cox and Snell R^2 and Nagelkerke R^2 values indicate the part of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model. In the model, the variance of the dependent variable (taste for activities related to catering) ranges between 0.044 and 0.063.

The model correctly classifies 71.7 % of the cases, so we can accept it (greater than 50 % of the cases).

Regarding the relationship of the independent variables with the dependent variable, age explains liking for promotional activities related to catering, so that the younger the age, the more likely it is to be liked. The strength for explaining the liking of promotional activities is 1.697 (1/ Exp (B)). The other socio-demographic variables (origin and gender) were not significant, so their values are not presented in the summary table.

Table 5 shows the results obtained from the binary logistic regression where the dependent variable is participation in promotional activities related to catering. This variable was also previously transformed into a dichotomous variable.

The Chi-square significance of the model in the omnibus test (Sig. = 0.02 < 0.05) indicates that the independent variables (socio-demographic characteristics) explain the dependent variable (participation in promotional activities).

The model is significant, the variance of the dependent variable ranges from 0.043 to 0.059. The model correctly classifies 65.1 % of the cases, so the model is accepted.

Again, the socio-demographic variable age explains participation in gastronomic activities related to catering. The lower the age, the higher the probability of participation in such activities. The strength to explain participation (1/Exp(B)) is 1.579. Since the other socio-demographic variables are not significant, their values are not added to the table.

TABLE 4

Logistic regression referring to liking for participation in promotional activities

Liking for...	B	Standard error	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)
Age	-0.530	0.154	11.777	0.001*	0.589
Constant	0.626	1.652	0.143	0.705	1.869
Classification	71.70 %				
R ² Cox and Snell	0.044				
R ² Nagelkerke	0.063				
Test Omnibus	X ² (6) = 13.637			Sig. = 0.034	
Test Hosmer and Lemeshow	X ² (8) = 2.69			Sig. = 0.952	

Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 5

Logistic regression referring to participation in promotional activities

Participation in...	B	Standard error	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)
Age	-0.458	0.144	10.038	0.002*	0.633
Constant	-1.238	0.916	1.828	0.176	0.290
Classification	65.10 %				
R ² Cox and Snell	0.043				
R ² Nagelkerke	0.059				
Test Omnibus	X ² (6) = 13.348			Sig. = 0.02	
Test Hosmer and Lemeshow	X ² (8) = 7.63			Sig. = 0.47	

Source: Own elaboration.

Awareness of Ternasco de Aragón Club

The responses to the question on suggested knowledge of the establishments belonging to the Ternasco de Aragón Club show that 63.4 % of those surveyed knew of some of the restaurants belonging to the Ternasco de Aragón Club, while 58.4 % acknowledged frequenting or having visited one of them. The recommendation of family and friends was the main source of information through which they had learned of its existence in slightly more than half of those surveyed, which shows the importance of the advice of people close to them.

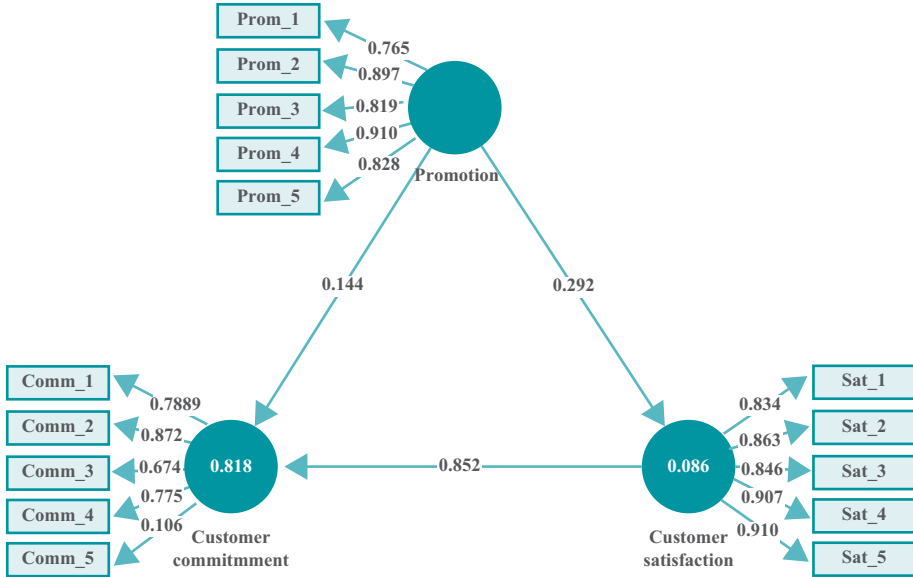
3.2. Relationship of the restaurants belonging to the Ternasco de Aragón Club with the final consumer (B2C)

Structural equation modelling (SEM)

The theoretical model was calculated using SEM:

FIGURE 3

Path coefficients calculated by partial least squares



Source: Own elaboration.

To test the hypotheses the model was analysed.

Assessment of measurement model

Internal consistency: according to Hair *et al.* (2014), values of 0.6–0.7 for Cronbach’s α and composite reliability are acceptable in exploratory research (Table 6).

Convergent validity: a common rule to measure the correlation between the items of a specific construct is to look at the outer loadings, shown in Figure 3. Loadings of indicators should be 0.708 or higher and significant (Hair *et al.*, 2014). In our model this requirement is met except for *Comm_3* and *Comm_5*, but they were kept because they improved the model. An average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.50 or higher indicates that, on average, the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair *et al.*, 2014). This condition is also met in our model (Table 6). In Maza *et al.* (2024) –Appendix B_Statistic description of the variables and covariance matrix– a statistic description of the variables and covariances matrix are available.

TABLE 6
Construct reliability and validity

Items	Internal consistency		Convergent validity
	Composite reliability	Cronbach's α	AVE
Promotion	0.926	0.926	0.715
Prom_1 I have seen this logo in some establishments			
Prom_2 I have seen this logo on social networks and the web			
Prom_3 I know very well what this logo represents			
Prom_4 Every time I feel like eating Ternasco outside my home, I go to an establishment that has this logo			
Prom_5 It is well known in my city			
Satisfaction	0.941	0.941	0.761
Sat_1 In this establishment, I am always offered products of quality standard			
Sat_2 I know that the quality offered at this establishment will not disappoint me			
Sat_3 I am sure to return to this establishment			
Sat_4 I always recommend this establishment because of the quality it provides			
Sat_5 The service offered by this establishment is adapted to my needs			
Commitment	0.822	0.796	0.524
Comm_1 I really enjoy the experience that this establishment gives me			
Comm_2 This establishment offers superior value for money			
Comm_3 The next time I feel like Ternasco, I will go to this establishment			
Comm_4 I feel at home in this establishment			
Comm_5 I go to this establishment for convenience			

Source: Own elaboration.

Following Hair *et al.* (2014), to assess the discriminant validity of our model we look at the indicators' loadings on each construct and they should be higher than all its cross-loadings with other constructs (Table 7). The heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) was also estimated to assess factor correlation (Table 8) and it should be significantly smaller than one (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The HTMT values were correct in all cases, which proves that the discriminant validity criterion was met.

TABLE 7
Discriminant validity, cross loadings values of indicators

	Promotion	Customer satisfaction	Customer commitment
Promotion			
Prom_1	0.765	0.278	0.303
Prom_2	0.897	0.226	0.341
Prom_3	0.819	0.279	0.333
Prom_4	0.910	0.228	0.348
Prom_5	0.828	0.278	0.336
Satisfaction			
Sat_1	0.283	0.834	0.732
Sat_2	0.283	0.863	0.761
Sat_3	0.231	0.846	0.761
Sat_4	0.236	0.907	0.821
Sat_5	0.247	0.910	0.820
Commitment			
Comm_1	0.303	0.815	0.889
Comm_2	0.341	0.781	0.872
Comm_3	0.370	0.557	0.674
Comm_4	0.268	0.709	0.775
Comm_5	0.051	0.091	0.106

Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 8

Discriminant validity, heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	HTMT
Promotion → Commitment	0.415
Promotion → Satisfaction	0.292
Satisfaction → Commitment	0.890

Source: Own elaboration.

Assessment of structural model

Once it was confirmed that the constructs measures were reliable and valid, the structural model was assessed. Variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to examine the collinearity since the path coefficients might be biased if the estimation involves significant levels of it (criterion used was no collinearity if VIF values < 5) (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Table 9 shows that all VIF values are below 5, therefore the structural model has acceptable levels of collinearity.

TABLE 9

Assessment of collinearity through variance inflation factor (VIF)

	VIF
Promotion → Customer satisfaction	1.000
Promotion → Customer commitment	1.094
Customer satisfaction → Customer commitment	1.094

Source: Own elaboration.

Path coefficients and their significance were examined through bootstrapping generating 1000 random samples (Pelegrín *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Table 10 illustrates the estimates' coefficients and their significance for the structural model. All relationships in the structural model are significant.

Promotion had a significant and positive effect on commitment and satisfaction, and satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on commitment. As can be seen in Table 10, support was found in all three hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3). Critical ratios are available in Maza *et al.* (2024) –Appendix B–.

TABLE 10

**Estimated coefficients, their significance for the structural model
and effect size (f^2)**

The hypothesized path	Standardized coefficient β	t-value	p-value	Support	f^2
(H1) Promotion → Commitment	0.144	3.343	0.001***	Supported	0.104
(H2) Promotion → Satisfaction	0.292	4.786	0.000***	Supported	0.094
(H3) Satisfaction → Commitment	0.852	16.668	0.000***	Supported	3.637

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: SmartPLS™ $n = 5000$ (Critical values for two-tailed test are $t = 1.645$ (significance level 10 %; $df = 4999$); $t = 1.960$ (0.05; $df = 4999$); $t = 2.577$ (0.01; $df = 4999$); $t = 3.292$ (0.001; $df = 4999$).

Source: Own elaboration.

R^2 indicates the percentage of variability accounted for by the precursor constructs in the model (Table 11) (Henseler, 2018).

TABLE 11

Model explanatory power R^2

	R^2
Customer commitment	0.818
Customer satisfaction	0.086

Source: Own elaboration.

Considering the results of the model customer satisfaction with the restaurant has a very significant influence on customer commitment. And promotion shows a low influence on consumer satisfaction and commitment.

The measurement model is significant and reliable, with convergent validity and discriminant validity in each of its constructs.

The structural model, according to the data obtained, shows no evidence of multicollinearity, the algebraic sign, magnitude, and statistical significance are empirically supported. The R^2 indicates that the satisfaction effect explains 81.8 % of the commitment with the final customer and the effect of promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club explains 8.6 % of satisfaction.

Following Henseler (2018), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was taken to assess model fit, where a value of 0 for SRMR would indicate a perfect fit and a value of less than 0.05 indicates an acceptable fit. The cut-off value of 0.08 proposed by Hu & Bentler (1998) was also taken into account (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). In this case the SMRS value of the model is 0.043 so it would be considered an acceptable fit.

The objective of the analysis of the relationship between the restaurants and their customers was reached testing the three initial hypotheses:

H1: promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club influences commitment to the restaurant.

H2: promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club influence satisfaction with the restaurant.

H3: customer satisfaction influences commitment to the restaurant.

4. Conclusions

The initiative of creating a club of restaurants around a traditional product is a novel action that falls within the framework of relationship marketing (B2C). For these relationships to be maintained, it is important to create value, meet expectations and leave the customer satisfied. This study shed light on who are the customers of the Club and their knowledge about it, and the relationship between the restaurants belonging to the Club.

This study revealed that consumers that mostly frequent restaurants that belong to the Ternasco de Aragón Club have a local and traditional profile and they are also concerned with their health, they prefer to buy fresh rather than frozen food products and value traditional cuisine. They also like to go to restaurants with family and friends and eating out on special occasions.

The results also highlight that even when most of the sample are people that regularly consume Ternasco of Aragón both at home and outside the home, they are not aware of the Ternasco de Aragón Club. This implies that maybe the communication regarding this initiative is not reaching consumers, who said that they consume the product, and that they are customers of the establishments, but they do not know about the Club. This study also found that participants would like to find Ternasco meat outside their region, which indicates that the product is convenient, even when they are not in their usual place.

On the one hand, these results seem to indicate that there is a need to improve communication for the final customer with regard to the existence of the Club. We believe that greater promotion of the club would lead to greater awareness

and possibly greater consumer commitment with the restaurants. Considering that the establishments are known by indications from close people who recommend the place, even when they are unaware of their membership in the Club, it could be interesting to increase on-site promotion, so the customer not only leaves the establishment satisfied, but also aware that the restaurant belongs to the Club. In addition, it would also be advisable to adapt the promotional activities to young people, in order to get them engaged with the product and to make them aware of the Club's existence. Some ideas would be the use of digital tools and social networks to reach this group.

On the other hand, from the structural equation model, it was confirmed that customer satisfaction has a high influence on customer commitment to the establishment. However, promotion of the Ternasco de Aragón Club has a very low influence on customer satisfaction and customer commitment, which could be due to the low knowledge of it.

Some limitations should be noted in this research. The first is that the study was conducted before the pandemic and consumers' habits outside home could now have changed, although it is true that some reports have indicated that it seems that the consumption of meat outside the home is recovering after the strong contraction suffered in 2020 (MAPA, 2023). Second, this study collects a convenience sample where the quota for those with a higher education level is over-represented. Lamb meat consumption has been reported to be influenced by the level of studies variable, especially when quality labels are involved. The implication this may have for our work is that our results could not be easy to generalize, and it would be necessary to broaden the sample to balance educational levels to obtain more representative of the population. Finally, due to the difficulties to carry out the survey in restaurants at lunch time, part of the data was collected face-to-face, and part of the data was collected online. It should be noted that the different ways of collecting the data may have influenced the responses of the participants.

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