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DO ICT BOOST BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SATISFACTION IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY?

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Abstract. Tourism is a highly sensitive industry concerned about the social and economic consequences of instability. In this sense, it is vital to understand how relationships develop and what factors lead to satisfaction among the stakeholders. Most research on tourism has focused on analysing B2C relationships, but B2B relationships have been considerably neglected. This paper aims to test whether theoretical relationships postulated in a B2C setting are transferable to the B2B environment. A novel model is postulated to explain the factors that lead to satisfaction among tourism businesses by considering technology, customer orientation, sustainability, and brand equity as key antecedents for social and economic satisfaction in B2B relations. Data from 268 managers of Spanish hotels were collected through a survey. The results obtained through partial least squares regression show that all but one of the hypotheses proposed in the model are supported, so that technology fosters both customer orientation and sustainability. Moreover, the chain customer orientation-brand equity-sustainability-social satisfaction-economic satisfaction, and therefore, this work contributes to understanding the elements that boost economic satisfaction in the relationships between hotels and travel agencies, and provides recommendations on the efficient use of technology.

Keywords: B2B, ICT, customer orientation, brand equity, sustainability, social satisfaction, economic satisfaction.

JEL Classification: M300, M310.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has been exposed to constant change and it has become one of the sectors most affected in the new business scenario after the pandemic (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2023). Being highly sensitive to the effects of destabilising factors, which generates dramatic social and economic consequences that put the stability of millions of people and companies at risk (Lu et al., 2022), this industry needs to find adequate mechanisms to respond to the problems that it faces, both from a theoretical and practical approach.

In the marketing literature, several scholars have focused their research on analysing B2C (business-to-consumer) relationships (Sales-Vivó et al., 2021), while studies analysing B2B

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(business-to-business) relationships are scarcer (Gligor & Maloni, 2022). Thus, a broader and more contextualised analysis is required to shed light on the persistent void in the study of inter-organizational relations (Gil-Saura et al., 2020).

Traditionally, B2B and B2C relationships have been considered as two different entities. However, there is an emerging trend to unify their analysis as it all relates to the experiences arising from interactions between individuals (Gil-Saura et al., 2020). Nevertheless, relationships between companies tend to be more durable over time and more complex than those between companies and consumers (He & Zhang, 2022). This study aims to provide to provide significant theoretical and practical insights. From a theoretical standpoint, this study assesses whether various theoretical relationships validly postulated in a B2C context are transferable to the B2B environment, considering relationships between partners in the hotel sector. Thus, a novel model is proposed that integrates key factors that explain the way of articulating relations between tourism companies, taking as its origin the information and communication technologies (hereinafter ICT) and promoting through them strategic factors of positioning, such as customer orientation, brand equity, and sustainability, within the hotel industry. The intention is to outline a new route of connections that promotes satisfaction between the partners in the relationship, understanding this satisfaction from the necessary dual perspective when dealing with B2B relationships, that is, both social and economic. From a practical perspective, this research aims to help managers in the hotel sector to understand how relationships are conducted and offers a guide to establish actions to increase stakeholder satisfaction. Currently, it is observed that relationship management in this sector is dealt with empirically and does not follow a sequence; therefore, the novelty of this proposal lies in showing the factors that lead to satisfaction and helping managers in their decision-making process so that they can strengthen their ties with their partners.

In a B2B setting, the adequacy of the factors that determine both social satisfaction and economic satisfaction between the partners in a B2B relation is complex, especially in tourism (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2023). For this reason, and to contribute to the development of this field of research, it is intended to examine how these relationships are built, between hotels and travel agencies, when seeking to increase dual satisfaction, shedding light on its nature and scope. The reason for considering satisfaction, in its dual approach, is based on the increasingly low levels of complaisance observed in relationships between partners in the tourism industry (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2023). In this sense, there are several determining factors that the literature indicates can influence said satisfaction. Specifically, they highlight: ICT (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022), customer orientation (Liu et al., 2022), sustainability (Casidy & Yan, 2022), and brand equity (Rojas-Lamorena et al., 2022). To the best of our knowledge, the study of these variables together is limited and mainly predominant in the B2C environment. There is still a long way to go to establish the individual characteristics of these chained effects in a B2B research context, in view of the scant and mixed empirical evidence observed (Rodríguez del Bosque et al., 2006; Ferro-Soto et al., 2023). The purpose of this work is to investigate how both economic and social satisfaction is determined among tourism companies considering the effects of technology, customer orientation, sustainability, and brand equity.

The paper is divided into two parts. Firstly, an analysis of the main bibliographical sources related to the topic of this work and to the variables that are part of the theoretical model is performed. Secondly, the methodology is defined and the hypotheses proposed in the model are contrasted, in order to subsequently define the conclusions and draw implications from the results.

2. Literature review

The study of inter-organizational relationships in the tourism industry has predominantly adopted a theoretical perspective of economic exchange, focusing its research fundamentally on financial transactions and metrics (Gil-Saura et al., 2020). When it comes to behaviour or conduct analysis, research has tended to opt for relationships between companies and tourists (Lu et al., 2022), largely neglecting their study between companies. Therefore, although in the tourism sector relationships with the end user are important, it is also necessary to deepen how the links between tourism companies are articulated to ensure the satisfaction of all the parties involved in the different processes. Only when the partners in the relationship feel benefitted, is it possible to improve both the provision and the obtaining of the service (Høgevold et al., 2020).

Satisfaction is considered the most prominent measure of the suitability of the relationship between partners, as well as a valuable tool to predict the continuity and maintenance of relations in the long term (Sales-Vivó et al., 2020). It is defined as a feeling of pleasure that results from an interaction or consumption experience by comparing the perceived result in relation to expectations (Lovelock & Wirtz, 1997). In the tourism sector, satisfaction reflects advantages in both the social and economic fields, so it is advisable to analyse them from this dual approach. In this way, economic satisfaction has been conceptualised as a positive judgment that the company makes of the financial gains stemming from the relationship with another partner (discounts, promotions, etc.). For its part, social satisfaction is a positive evaluation that companies make of the relationship with another company, and focuses on the psychosocial cues of the contact between the parties (fluid communication, good treatment, politeness, etc.) (Sales-Vivó et al., 2020). Studies such as Rodriguez del Bosque et al. (2006) suggest that economic satisfaction is a driver of social satisfaction; however, the opposite effect is tested in the present research. The reason for proposing this sense of causality is that partners more easily obtain economic pleasure if they first make a rewarding evaluation of the interactions with the other party and gain enjoyment from the business relationship (Sales-Vivó et al., 2021).

At this point, there are several factors that participate in the generation of satisfaction. First, ICT plays an unprecedented role in the tourism field, providing strategic tools for companies to improve their experience and understand behaviours at different stages of decision-making (Buhalis et al., 2023). It is understood as an innovation tool created for companies to interact synchronously, offer customised services, and find an optimal allocation of resources (Law et al., 2022). In the literature, the term ICT is used to refer to several communication devices and systems to create, store, communicate and/or present digital information (Charfeddine & Umlai, 2023).

ICT not only improves communications between partners, but also optimises fulfilment of strategic marketing objectives related to market management (Kumar et al., 2024), placing sustainability and customer orientation as relational axes that drive the value of the company brand (Winit et al., 2023; Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022) through the bond between travel agency and hotel. In this sense, customer orientation needs tools that allow its development beyond its assumption as a business culture (Bui & Le, 2023). In this way, ICT is a driver of hotel competitiveness through the adoption of practices that foster increased performance and long-run partner relationships (Gomes et al., 2024). ICT has been considered as the main driver of the chain of effects that culminates in satisfaction, as it is an operational tool that enables interaction and cooperation in services (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022), particularly important in B2B contexts (Sombultawee & Wattanatorn, 2022).

In the literature, different theories have been considered to evaluate technology. The most commonly cited are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Firstly, the TAM model suggested by Davis et al. (1989) addresses people's ability to predict technology through the measurement of their intentions, and how to explain intentions in terms of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Bialkova, 2024). Secondly, the UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003) extends TAM to include four direct determinants of acceptance and behaviour, namely: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions (Bialkova, 2024). Although these theories have their significance, in the present research, due to the focus on the B2B sector, we have considered mechanisms that may be more in line with the business context, such as, for example, the scales and mechanisms proposed by Wu et al. (2006) to assess the influence of information technology on the capabilities and performance of firms.

On the other hand, customer orientation has been included as it is a key determinant for strategic decision-making (Liu et al., 2022), given that by knowing the wishes, opinions, and concerns of customers, more accurate decisions can be made. Customer orientation, defined as the beliefs or behaviours of a company targeted at prioritising the interests and needs of customers (Liu et al., 2022), has been highlighted as a relevant antecedent for strategic decision-making in any B2B relationship. In this way, customer orientation helps to improve relationships between participants and promotes closer interactions that allow the development of process and product innovations thanks to suggestions of customers and the analysis of market trends (Tuominen et al., 2023).

For its part, sustainability plays a transcendental role in B2B relationships (Gogia et al., 2024), defining sustainable development as that which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland et al., 1987). In order to assess the importance of this factor, a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach is considered as it has been considered before in the tourism industry (Cranmer et al., 2023), analysing three dimensions separately due to the environmental, social, and economic impact of organisations (Elkington, 1998). Specifically, the environmental dimension refers to the activities carried out by companies to develop goods and services minimising their impact on the environment (Edeigba & Arasanmi, 2022); the social dimension relates to the ability of companies to improve quality of life by strengthening the bonds with their stakeholders (Tavitiyaman & Zhang, 2024); and the economic dimension corresponds to the stability and solvency of companies, which is a key requirement for their survival (Andersson et al., 2022). Sustainability is considered due to the multiple positive effects attributed to it. For example, companies that engage in sustainable practices are perceived as environmentally responsible organisations (Elshaer et al., 2023), and, therefore, partners can obtain social satisfaction from working with them, and in turn, the company has economic satisfaction by generating greater profitability through lasting and constant relationships over time (Sales-Vivó et al., 2021).

Brand equity, defined as the "value added to a product by its brand name" (Yoo et al., 2000, p. 195), also plays a vital role in B2B relationships in the tourism sector. Indeed, brand equity contributes to relationships between companies by creating added value that facilitates the achievement of competitive advantages (Kapitan et al., 2022).

The relationship between partners (hotel-travel agency), improved through ICT, will in turn optimise the value that the hotel -through its brand equity- offers the end customer (Janjua et al., 2023). If, in addition, sustainability represents an internalised value in the hotel, in the integral management of the multiple stakeholders that are involved in its development, the brand equity will be enhanced (Shanti & Joshi, 2022), providing said sustainability with

competitive advantages (Casidy & Yan, 2022). All this, as a whole, allows the hotel to value the contribution from its relationship with the agency, in an approach where the chain of satisfaction is a consequence (Nguyen et al., 2024), to the extent that ICT allows the achievement of the abovementioned strategic objectives, that is, an improvement in customer orientation (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022) and a boost to sustainability.

From the literature review conducted, we have found support to the formulation of a series of hypotheses. Firstly, in recent years, ICT has been analysed from different perspectives in various fields of research due to its importance in the business world and specifically in B2B relationships (Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2017). However, its impact is still questioned, and researchers have not reached conclusive results (Zhang & Wei, 2022) since both positive influences and negative impacts have been observed for this factor. On the one hand, it is an interactive tool that allows hotel partners to be more actively involved in their business relationships (Buhalis et al., 2023), and on the other hand, the differences in ICT adoption across participants is likely to create barriers in the relationship between the partners (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022). Along these lines, Jagodič and Milfelner (2022) conclude that technologies allow firms to adapt to B2B markets according to the market trends identified. Therefore, ICT act as a key instrument to gather, treat, and distribute information.

Similarly, the link between ICT and sustainability is considered a key determinant for satisfaction in a B2B context (Chatterjee et al., 2023). This relationship may be explained by the fact that hospitality is a highly competitive industry, which used resources intensively, so that it is important to assess if ICT contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry (Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2017). In this way, it is to be expected that the link between ICT and sustainability makes it possible to enhance firm competitiveness through cost savings, increased reliability, and an improved responsiveness to customers (de Vass et al., 2021). Based on this evidence, we state the following hypotheses:

H1: ICT exerts a positive and significant effect on customer orientation.

H2: ICT exerts a positive and significant effect on sustainability.

On the other hand, several works have considered brand equity as a key factor in B2B environments (Kapitan et al., 2022), since it allows companies to generate multiple advantages, such as the ability to set higher prices than competitors, or in turn, retain business partners in the long run, even if competitors implement the same marketing strategies (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022). In this sense, in relationships between companies, customer orientation is important, offering personalised treatment, since it serves as a differentiating element for decision-making and improves the credibility associated with the brand in question (Rojas-Lamorena et al., 2022). Specifically, there is empirical evidence supporting the relationship between customer orientation and brand equity (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022). Therefore, we posit:

H3: Customer orientation exerts a positive and significant impact on brand equity.

In line with the above, in business-to-business relationships, it is vital to plan and develop business relationships in a sustainable manner (Chatterjee et al., 2023), since, to survive and thrive, companies must increase business efficiency, strive to improve market share, retain the best specialists, and make relationships last through sustainability (Streimikiene et al., 2021). Academics disagree about the interrelation, meanings, dimensions, and perspectives of sustainability (Zeng et al., 2022), although the most accepted criterion is the one that identifies three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Elkington, 1998). Several studies have considered these dimensions in manifold areas of research (Hysa et al.,

2020; Andersson et al., 2022), and, in particular, in the tourism sector (Oriade et al., 2021; Ozturkoglu et al., 2021; Zutshi et al., 2022; Moosa & He, 2023). Considering this evidence, it is proposed that:

H4: Sustainability is made up of three dimensions: the environmental dimension (H4a), the social dimension (H4b), and the economic dimension (H4c).

In the tourism sector, more and more voices call for the adoption of a sense of purpose beyond simply making a profit by selling products or offering services, adopting a sustainable approach that encompasses the economic, social and environmental spheres as a whole (Elkington, 1998). It has been argued that, under a sustainable approach, companies reinforce their brand, which allows them to have greater bargaining power with suppliers, competitive advantages over competitors, and to improve customer evaluation (Hysa et al., 2020). Some companies in the tourism sector implement green practices in response to the government regulations to avoid negative consequences derived from corporate irresponsibility. However, this approach is not the only option, as companies that are motivated to voluntarily implement sustainable practices can generate long-term benefits, such as gaining proactive leadership, increasing share value, improving trust, and building a reputation (Winit et al., 2023). Therefore, it is assumed that sustainability plays a transcendental role in the construction of brand equity, and it is proposed that:

H5: Sustainability exerts a positive and significant impact on brand equity.

Despite growing interest in the study of sustainability, evidence in the B2B environment concerning the link sustainability-satisfaction is still scarce (Marín-García et al., 2021). Thus, adopting a position focused on sustainability allows a company to convey its sustainable initiatives to improve its image and reputation (Casidy & Yan, 2022), but it also implies that satisfaction must be prioritised, since it is a fundamental objective of any commercial interaction. Countless hotel companies measure satisfaction as an indicator of economic and business performance (Hult et al., 2022). However, when it comes to sustainability, there are other important factors that can also lead to satisfaction and that affect, together with the economic ones, the overall evaluation of the relationship. For example, social satisfaction entails a general evaluation of all the psychosocial aspects involved in the interaction, such as gratitude, peace of mind, and shared values (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2023). In this sense, it is stated that sustainability is an adequate factor to affect satisfaction (Marín-García et al., 2022). In addition, brand equity is considered a precedent for social satisfaction, since practically all the areas in which the brand is built -image, reputation, personality, etc.- and the perceptions of value associated with it contribute to increased satisfaction, from its more relational perspective (González-Mansilla et al., 2023). Thus, the following hypotheses are outlined:

H6: Sustainability exerts a positive and significant effect on social satisfaction.

H7: Brand equity exerts a positive and significant effect on social satisfaction.

Finally, in B2B contexts, the literature has distinguished between social satisfaction and economic satisfaction (Sales-Vivó et al., 2021), being more common to find authors arguing that economic satisfaction has a positive and direct influence on social satisfaction (Sales-Vivó et al., 2020). Notwithstanding, this study hypothesises the opposite effect. This is because, initially, in the tourism sector, building fruitful interactions between the participants, having favourable perceptions of the other partner, understanding that one of them has true interest for the other, will generate positive emotions (Ferro-Soto et al., 2023), which, in turn, will result in social and later economic satisfaction in the participants (Sales-Vivó et al., 2021). In

the context of the relationship of the hotel companies with its main partner, it is expected that there will be frequent contacts that foster an influence of the social on the economic (Berenguer-Contri et al., 2024). Considering this reflection, we posit:

H8: Social satisfaction exerts a positive and significant effect on economic satisfaction.

Based on the above, a theoretical model is proposed (see Figure 1) that includes variables widely studied in the field of tourism with the aim of finding an adequate mechanism that sheds light on the identification of the determinants of satisfaction, both social and economic, in B2B environments.

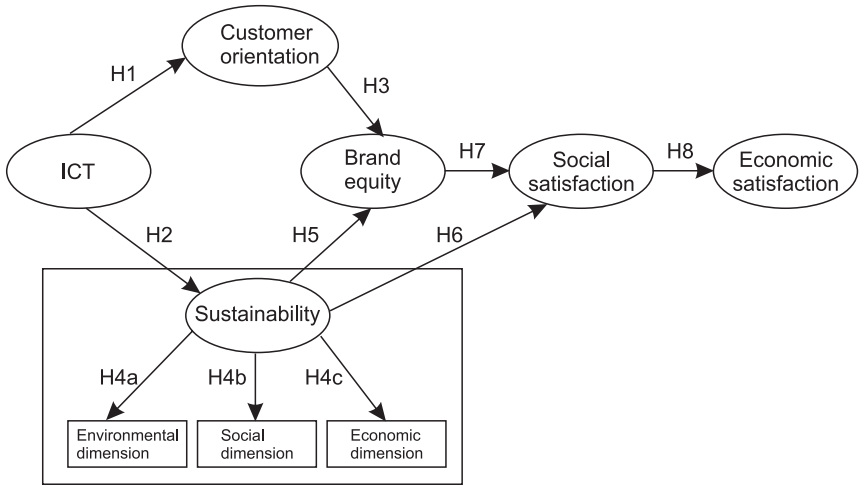

Figure 1. Proposed model (source: authors' proposal)

3. Methodology

3.1. Measurement of variables

To measure the variables included in our model, several scales already validated in the literature were adapted (Table 1 and Appendix). For the collection of information, a measurement instrument was used that, in addition to the classification questions of the sample elements, contained the aforementioned variables. Each item is scored on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Table 1. Measurement scales used (source: author's proposal)

Construct	Scale
ICT	Wu et al. (2006)
Customer orientation	Deshpandé et al. (1993); Deshpandé and Farley (1998)
Sustainability	Xu and Gursoy (2015)
Brand equity	Hernández-Espallardo and Navarro-Bailón (2009); Shen (2010), adapted from Yoo et al. (2000)
Social satisfaction Economic satisfaction	Chung et al. (2011), adapted from Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000) and Anderson and Narus (1990)

3.2. Sampling and collection of information

The information is collected through a structured questionnaire. Respondents are initially contacted by telephone (up to 5 attempts) to set an appointment to complete the questionnaire face-to-face or by telephone with an interviewer, or providing an online link to fill the questionnaire.

The sample includes Spanish hotels, being the key informant the hotel manager or person in charge (Table 2). This individual was briefed on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire is structured in three parts: (1) data on the hotel's activity and its relationship with the travel agency that was its main supplier; (2) items to measure the variables included in the model, and (3) information on the company's socioeconomic classification. A database of hotels was elaborated from own lists prepared from previous studies, updated and completed with several directories (e.g. ALIMARKET, DUNS 100,000 databases). In this way, a list of 750 three-, four-, and five-star hotel establishments in three Spanish regions (i.e. Catalonia, the Valencian Community, and Madrid) was drawn up. Data from 268 hotels out of 681 contacted could be analyzed (83: Barcelona, 104: Valencia, 81: Madrid), with a response rate of 39.5%. The R package "expss" (Demin, 2020) is used to test the hypotheses.

Table 2. Hotel sample characterization (source: author's proposal)

Characteristics		Frequency	Valid percentage
Hotel category (stars)	3	113	42.2%
	4	136	50.7%
	5	19	7.1%
Period of activity	Open all year	256	95.5%
	Temporary	12	4.5%
Location	City	234	87.3%
	Coast	25	9.3%
	Others	9	3.4%
Hotel positioning	Leisure	101	38.1%
	Business	107	40.4%
	Others	60	21.5%
Hotel ownership	Independent hotel	92	34.3%
	Belonging to a hotel chain	176	65.7%
	Total	268	100%

Characteristics	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Number of rooms	5	869	102	87.854
Number of permanent employees	1	6	2,20	1.146

3.3. Validation of the measurement instrument

Since the scales adapted to measure the variables in our model have been widely validated in several works (Gil-Saura et al., 2020; Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2023), we proceeded to test the measurement model and calculate the structural relationships model parameters through

the partial least squares regression (PLS) technique, using the "SEMinR" (Ray et al., 2021) and "matrixpls" (Rönkkö, 2016) packages with the R software. Instead of covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM), we used Partial-Least Squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) since it generates stable and robust results even with samples between 100 and 200 units of observation (Chin, 1998; Do Valle & Assaker, 2016). Indeed, this approach has been widely used in research in hospitality with samples of 200 individuals or less (e.g. Assaker, 2020). Moreover, the requirements of sample size for PLS-SEM were met, according to the 10-times rule (Barclay et al., 1995). Thus, we used PLS-SEM in view of the characteristics of the sample in terms of data collected and sample profile (Hair et al., 2017). The power or adequacy of the sample is tested using R's "pwr" package (Champely, 2020).

4. Analysis of results

4.1. Measurement model validation

First of all, the sample adequacy test provided by the R pwr package (Champely, 2020) shows a mean effect (f^2) of 0.15 ($p < 0.05$; 99.9% power) (Cohen, 1988).

On the other hand, the measurement model was characterised by using a second-order construct, sustainability, which was computed using the two-phase method including "SEMinR". The psychometric properties of the scales satisfactory, in view of the values obtained for reliability and convergent validity (Table 3), as well as for the results of the discriminant validity analyses (Table 4). There was an indicator of the social dimension of sustainability (SUS_S2) that was eliminated due to low loading, but another with a value of 0.391 was retained for its contribution to the result of its corresponding latent variable. The rest of the items with loadings between 0.4 and 0.7 were retained due to content validity and taking into account the exploratory nature of our model. Assessing reliability, Cronbach's alpha (Alpha) and the values of the composite reliability (CR), measured by the rhoC index, of the scales were above 0.7. Regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the scales, which yield values higher than 0.5 in all cases, are considered adequate.

Table 3. Measurement model: reliability and convergent validity (source: authors' proposal)

Construct/Items (first order)	Loads	Alpha	CR	AVE
ICT Information and Communication Technologies		0.855	0.903	0.700
ICT1. This hotel invests in technology.	0.855			
ICT2. ICT in this hotel is always the latest technology.	0.896			
ICT3. In relation to competitors, the technology in this hotel is more advanced.	0.866			
ICT4. This hotel considers customers' opinions to coordinate and develop ICT to improve the service and satisfy customer needs better.	0.719			
CO Customer Orientation		0.892	0.913	0.541
CO1. We have routine or regular measures of customer service.	0.698			
CO2. Our service development is based on good market and customer information.	0.839			
CO3. We know our competitors well.	0.735			

Continued Table 3

Construct/Items (first order)	Loads	Alpha	CR	AVE
CO4. We have a good sense of how our customers value our services.	0.793			
CO5. We are more customer focused than our competitors.	0.793			
CO6. We compete primarily based on service differentiation.	0.574			
CO7. The customer`s interest should always come first, ahead of the hotel.	0.649			
CO8. Our services are the best in the business.	0.733			
CO9. I believe this business exists primarily to serve customers.	0.773			
SUS_EN Sustainability Environmental dimension		0.916	0.932	0.633
SUS_EN1. Our hotel buys environmentally sustainable products.	0.842			
SUS_EN2. Our hotel manages services in an environmentally sustainable way.	0.889			
SUS_EN3. Our hotel manages the product during its use, controls its use so that it is not wasted.	0.797			
SUS_EN4. Our hotel extends product life.	0.812			
SUS_EN5. Our hotel recycles / implements a recycling programme.	0.757			
SUS_EN6. Our hotel controls the pollution (generated by the hotel).	0.832			
SUS_EN7. Our hotel implements environmental management systems.	0.780			
SUS_S Sustainability Social dimension		0.940	0.962	0.893
SUS_S1. Our hotel cares about the well-being of its employees.	0.630			
SUS_S3. Our hotel cares about the well-being of the local community.	0.941			
SUS_S4. Our hotel cares about the well-being of its suppliers.	0.951			
SUS_S5. Our hotel concerns about the well-being of the institutions with which it interacts and that of the public authorities.	0.955			
SUS_E Sustainability Economic dimension		0.923	0.951	0.937
SUS_E1. Our hotel attaches great importance to the rate of revenue growth.	0.925			
SUS_E2. Our hotel attaches great importance to cost control.	0.911			
SUS_E3. Our hotel attaches great importance to the growth rate of market share.	0.955			
BE Brand Equity		0.917	0.931	0.599
BE1. Improve guests' image of the hotel.	0.754			
BE2. Improve the perceived quality of the hotel.	0.811			
BE3. It gives the hotel personality.	0.755			
BE4. Increases guest loyalty to the hotel.	0.819			
BE5. Increases the hotel's reputation.	0.703			
BE6. I think it makes more sense for this TRAVEL AGENCY to work with this hotel than with others.	0.760			

End of Table 3

Construct/Items (first order)	Loads	Alpha	CR	AVE
BE7. I think this TRAVEL AGENCY prefers this hotel for business, even if other hotels have the same characteristics.	0.806			
BE8. I prefer to work with this hotel, even if there are others as good as this one.	0.778			
BE9. Even if another hotel is like this one, I think this TRAVEL AGENCY would be wiser to choose this one.	0.779			
SS Social Satisfaction		0.856	0.912	0.777
SS1. Interactions between my hotel and this TRAVEL AGENCY are characterized by mutual respect.	0.817			
SS2. I am satisfied with the overall working relationship.	0.928			
SS3. If I could do it again, I would choose this TRAVEL AGENCY rather than another competing supplier's services.	0.896			
ES Economic Satisfaction		0.825	0.896	0.742
ES1. My relationship with this TRAVEL AGENCY has provided me with a dominant and profitable market position in my sales area.	0.858			
ES2. We are very pleased with our decision to work together with this TRAVEL AGENCY: the high quality of their services increases our guest traffic.	0.904			
ES3. The marketing policy of this TRAVEL AGENCY helps me to get my work done effectively.	0.819			
Items (second order)	Loads	Alpha	CR	AVE
SUS Sustainability		0.738	0.846	0.652
SUS_EN. Environmental dimension	0.864			
SUS_S. Social dimension	0.917			
SUS_E. Economic dimension	0.605			

Note: Alpha – Cronbach's alpha; CR – Composite Reliability; AVE – Average Variance Extracted.

The discriminant validity is tested, firstly, applying the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. From Table 4, it can be observed that all values on the main diagonal are greater than the correlations between the factors. Secondly, the discriminant validity was also confirmed using the cross-loadings method, since the load coefficients for each construct are greater than all cross-loadings for other variables (Hair et al., 2017). Alternatively, with values less

Table 4. Discriminant validity (source: author' proposal)

	ICT	CO	SUS	BE	SS	ES
ICT	0.837	0.662	0.534	0.286	0.210	0.098
CO	0.590	0.736	0.665	0.332	0.301	0.248
SUS	0.451	0.571	0.808	0.297	0.371	0.269
BE	0.243	0.295	0.275	0.739	0.510	0.570
SS	0.171	0.266	0.316	0.505	0.882	0.907
ES	0.076	0.217	0.222	0.542	0.771	0.861

Note: Values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE; Below the diagonal: Correlations between factors; Above the diagonal: HTMT ratio.

than 0.9 in the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), the discriminant validity of the proposed model is confirmed (Henseler et al., 2016) and the correlations between the items of different constructs are irrelevant. Only in the relationship between social and economic satisfaction, a value is seen at the limit of the indicator, but it was confirmed that the cross-loadings of both latent variables met the criterion of being higher in the construct itself than in the compared construct.

4.2. Structural equation model estimation and hypotheses testing

Once the measurement model was validated, the structural equation model is estimated using PLS to test significance of the structural relationships of the proposed model. The SRMR is 0.085, which allows us to state that the model has an adequate fit, since it is below 0.10. As displayed in Table 5, all the independent variables of the model have determination coefficient (R^2) values higher than 0.1, the minimum value stated by Falk and Miller (1992). Regarding the values for the predictive capacity (Q^2) statistic, they are all above zero (except for brand equity), thus supporting the predictive validity of the model, with reservations regarding the BE relationship, a construct that should be further explored.

Table 5. Structural equations model results (source: authors' proposal)

Hypothesis	Original est.	Bootstrap mean	Bootstrap SD	t stat.	2.5% CI	97.5% CI	Decision
H1. ICT -> CO	0.589	0.593	0.040	14.904	0.511	0.665	Supported
H2. ICT -> SUS	0.452	0.458	0.051	8.848	0.355	0.559	Supported
H3. CO -> BE	0.228	0.233	0.068	3.341	0.093	0.362	Supported
H4a. SUS_EN -> SUS	0.864	0.864	0.027	32.133	0.804	0.908	Supported
H4b. SUS_S -> SUS	0.918	0.917	0.012	78.096	0.891	0.938	Supported
H4c. SUS_E -> SUS	0.606	0.603	0.064	9.426	0.466	0.715	Supported
H5. SUS -> BE	0.145	0.149	0.076	1.913	0.000	0.295	Not supported
H6. SUS -> SS	0.202	0.202	0.051	3.956	0.102	0.303	Supported
H7. BE -> SS	0.416	0.419	0.063	6.643	0.292	0.539	Supported
H8. SS -> ES	0.771	0.774	0.034	22.892	0.705	0.834	Supported

Note: R^2 -> SUS = 0.204, CO = 0.347, BE = 0.111, SS = 0.260, ES = 0.595 | Q^2-> SUS = 0.124, CO = 0.179, BE = 0.061, SS = 0.197, ES = 0.456. SRMR = 0.085.

The results allow us to support all the hypotheses ($p < 0.01$) except H5, which relates sustainability to brand equity. In particular, it can be inferred that ICT exerts a positive impact on customer orientation (CO, H1: $\beta = 0.589$) and sustainability (SUS, H2: $\beta = 0.452$). Customer orientation, in turn, positively influences brand equity (BE, H3: $\beta = 0.228$). On the other hand, a second-order construct was generated whose relationships are expressed by H4, which endorses the positive significant relationship of the three aforementioned dimensions with the latent variable sustainability. Sustainability, however, does not show a significant relationship with brand equity (BE H5: $\beta = 0.145$), although it does with social satisfaction (SS, H6: $\beta =$

0.202). On the other hand, brand equity significantly influences social satisfaction (SS, H7: β = 0.416). Finally, social satisfaction shows a direct impact on economic satisfaction (ES, H8: β = 0.771). The study of the total effects (Table 6), i.e. the aggregation of the direct and indirect effects, reveals that brand equity exerts a medium-high level mediating effect (close to 0.5) on social satisfaction, the effect being higher compared to sustainability, ICT or, to a lesser extent, customer orientation. This hierarchy is also maintained in economic satisfaction in the same way.

Table 6. Total effects (source: authors' proposal)

Variables	CO	SUS	BE	SS	ES
ICT	0.589	0.452	0.200	0.174	0.134
CO	0.000	0.000	0.228	0.095	0.073
SUS	0.000	0.000	0.145	0.262	0.202
BE	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.416	0.321
SS	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.771
ES	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

4.3. Discussion of results

As a first point, some of the factors that are analysed individually in B2B contexts have been taken to compose a model that explains how stakeholders in the tourism sector achieve social and economic satisfaction considering ICT as a key driver. As a result of the data analysis, we find support to all hypotheses of the proposed model excepting one, i.e. the link between sustainability and brand equity. The non-fulfilment of this relationship may be due to multiple reasons, which we will proceed to explain below.

Regarding the relationships supported by our empirical findings, firstly, ICTs influence customer orientation, an approach previously supported by other studies in the tourism industry (Law et al., 2022), and aligned with the acknowledged importance of ICTs in today's business world, as they act as a link to facilitate communication between the parties involved in a business relationship (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022). Also, results support the notion that ICT influence sustainability, being this finding an important contribution to the knowledge of B2B relationships management in the tourism industry, in the line of the term of "sustainable information society", emphasising the role of ICT as a useful facilitator of firm sustainability (Ceynowa et al., 2023).

Besides, in a B2B context, previous research concludes that when a brand is perceived as unique, desirable, strong and goal-oriented, brand equity is higher (Srivastava et al., 2023). After conducting the respective statistical analysis, we support this relationship in this study, in accordance to previous studies show that customer orientation influences the generation of brand equity (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2022).

Sustainability is a topical issue due to its importance for society at large (Cranmer et al., 2023). In the literature, sustainability has been widely considered to be composed of environmental, social and economic dimensions, with reference to Elkington's (1998) approach. For this reason, this study has sought to verify that these dimensions can be validated in the tourism sector, within B2B relationships, and the results have been favourable. In this sense, within a business context, it is thought that sustainability can generate brand value for companies by being seen as entities committed to the environment (Elshaer et al., 2023),

however, this hypothesis has not been validated, and this may be due, among other reasons, to the fact that nowadays sustainability may not be perceived as an added value, but as an obligation and a business commitment, or in turn, that stakeholders do not perceive it as important and prioritise other issues, such as social or economic issues.

Last, the link between sustainability and social satisfaction (Marín-García et al., 2022), and brand value and social satisfaction (González-Mansilla et al., 2023) has been validated in various fields, due to the importance of these factors in B2B relationships. The present study aimed to verify that these relationships have the same effect in the tourism industry, and the hypotheses have been validated. Moreover, the findings of the study explain how ICT together with sustainability and brand equity drive satisfaction.

Finally, there is controversy in the extant literature on the relationship between social and economic satisfaction, with the opposite direction being considered in many cases (Sales-Vivó et al., 2020). Therefore, this study provides evidence on the positive impact of social satisfaction on economic satisfaction in the tourism sector, in contrast to the mainstream conclusions in other industries, which represents an important finding in this field.

5. Conclusions

The tourism industry operates in a highly competitive scenario where customer expectations and preferences are changing, which has generated uneasiness among business managers who are constantly looking for ways to generate economic satisfaction for their end customer and have considerably neglected their personal enjoyment and that of their partners. For this reason, it is important to analyse the factors that generate satisfaction in a B2B environment to help managers to better direct their efforts. More specifically, the findings of this research allow us to confirm the relationship that satisfaction has with its antecedents and evidencing that ICT, customer orientation, sustainability, and brand equity, emerge as relevant factors that influence social satisfaction and, subsequently, economic satisfaction among partners in the hotel sector. In short, we conclude that the hotel manager's economic satisfaction with the relationship with their supplier is conditioned by the aforementioned factors and that, in order to improve the current level of economic satisfaction, business managers must, among other matters: adapt to the new changes in society using ICT to interact effectively with its partners; adequately direct the client so that they know what the company does both internally and externally; implement sustainable practices, since these types of activities are widely accepted by partners in a B2B relationship; transmit an image of an organisation committed to mutual benefits and not only to personal benefits; and finally, focus on prioritising social satisfaction before economic benefits, since it has been verified that economic satisfaction is more easily obtained if partners in the tourism sector feel at ease in their business relationships. All in all, technology facilitates communication between partners, therefore, being a tool that favours interaction, this causes both social and economic satisfaction, as it is a part of the model that forms a behavioural mechanism.

This study allows us to draw substantial theoretical and practical implications about the relevance of satisfaction in a B2B context. From a theoretical viewpoint, although numerous previous studies have developed models seeking to explain the factors that precede economic satisfaction in the tourism industry, empirical research in the B2B field is rather limited, largely focusing on jobs in the B2C environment. In this sense, the present research tests a novel model that brings together factors that have been studied individually in the literature focused on the tourism industry. This represents a relevant contribution because

it has been tested in a B2B context, whereas most research in this area is aimed at the B2C environment. Furthermore, the results obtained shed light to the understanding of social and economic satisfaction, identifying the antecedents that condition these constructs, and contributing to address the research gap in the extant literature on B2B relationships. From a business standpoint, the findings of this research provide a guidance to the managers of the hotel sector organisations to improve B2B relations from a satisfaction approach. The practical contributions of the present research enable hotel managers and their partners to acknowledge the significance of ICT implementation in business relations. This empirical support provides guidance that will help to give ICT the priority it requires and improve communication, productivity and relationships between tourism partners to achieve social and economic satisfaction. In this way, ICT has profoundly altered tourism and made it possible to generate direct connections between suppliers and consumers, and it is essential that it is used appropriately to guide the client so that they are able to communicate effectively. In the same way, ICT exerts a crucial role in the sustainable development of companies, which, in order to be successful, must continuously adapt to changes. In this sense, sustainability is currently one of the most discussed topics, especially in the tourism sector, since it not only implies competitive advantages, but also refers to the continuity and development of businesses. Therefore, hotel managers should consider the implementation of sustainability practices in their companies, because although it has been found that this factor does not generate brand equity, it enhances social satisfaction in their partners, which strengthens relations in this industry. Moreover, tourism firms try to generate brand equity through incentives or monetary rewards in search of greater recognition. However, this approach does not allow the desired results to be achieved and actions based solely on economic stimuli may not be enough. Therefore, managers of hotel establishments should focus on generating value through customer orientation, considering their needs, suggestions, and the experiences associated with the brand in question. Likewise, it has been corroborated that brand equity and sustainability influence social satisfaction, so it is suggested that business leaders carry out actions that reflect the concern and commitment of the company with respect to the environmental, social and economic consequences facing the world from a sustainability perspective. Therefore, it is not only a matter of trying to create an image, but also of fully committing to this type of initiative so that relationships are lasting and satisfactory. Along these lines, companies must consider the suggestions, needs, and complaints of their partners or suppliers and try to respond as quickly and effectively as possible, which will provide the company with high brand equity, and both parties with social satisfaction.

Finally, to enhance social and economic satisfaction, managers should dedicate their efforts to strengthen social interactions with their partners or suppliers and not only focus on profit-making transactions. Surely, if both parties perceive a pleasant and welcoming environment, satisfaction will be the consequence of the interaction. If partners perceive the relationship between stakeholders as friendly and cordial, it will certainly be easier for them to achieve economic results later on. We emphasise that the findings of this research are not free from certain limitations that must be evaluated in order to draw conclusions from them and establish opportunities for future research. First, although the sample size is suitable for the statistical technique applied, with a higher number of respondents, the existence of differences based on the profile of the hotel establishment or other classification variables could be explored. Second, another geographical area could be considered, since there may be cultural discrepancies in other countries, adopting a cross-cultural approach. Third, the model may be replicated in a B2C setting to check if the direction of the relationship between

social and economic satisfaction can be validated in this area. Fourth, a comparative analysis of the manager's gender could be carried out to explore the presence of differences between male and female managers in the strength of the links between the variables compared to previous studies in the B2C field. Fifth, other constructs that can influence social and economic satisfaction may be included in the model, such as trust, commitment, or performance. Finally, it could be evaluated if the model can be applied in other sectors, such as industry or education, to determine if the observed relations between the variables are similar in other activities.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Basic statistics of the model indicators

Construct/ dimension	Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
ICT Information and Communication Technologies	ICT1	1.00	7.00	4.9812	1.20066
	ICT2	1.00	7.00	4.4394	1.22556
	ICT3	1.00	7.00	4.4811	.97132
	ICT4	1.00	7.00	5.5437	.98917
CO Customer Orientation	CO1	2.00	7.00	5.7808	1.04309
	CO2	2.00	7.00	5.7269	.98226
	CO3	2.00	7.00	5.7015	1.12200
	CO4	3.00	7.00	5.8830	.91466
	CO5	3.00	7.00	5.3745	1.18123
	CO6	3.00	7.00	6.0940	.84501
	CO7	3.00	7.00	5.9509	.93689
	CO8	1.00	7.00	5.3933	1.01248
	CO9	1.00	7.00	5.8855	1.03237
SUS_EN Sustainability Environmental dimension	SUS_ EN1	1.00	7.00	5.3184	1.26896
	SUS_ EN2	1.00	7.00	5.3068	1.30993
	SUS_ EN3	3.00	7.00	5.8528	.95451
	SUS_ EN4	2.00	7.00	5.7256	.96951
	SUS_ EN5	1.00	7.00	5.7687	1.18930
	SUS_ EN6	1.00	7.00	5.2053	1.33928
	SUS_ EN7	1.00	7.00	5.1723	1.44574
SUS_S Sustainability Social dimension	SUS_S1	1.00	7.00	6.1617	.94423
	SUS_S3	1.00	7.00	5.3396	1.24537
	SUS_S4	1.00	7.00	5.1992	1.26379
	SUS_S5	2.00	7.00	5.0951	1.30775
SUS_E Sustainability Economic dimension	SUS_E1	3.00	7.00	6.3459	.75990
	SUS_E2	3.00	7.00	6.4494	.74970
	SUS_E3	3.00	7.00	6.3647	.74358

End of Table A1

Construct/ dimension	Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
BE Brand Equity	BE1	1.00	7.00	5.2121	1.35210
	BE2	1.00	7.00	4.9850	1.37383
	BE3	1.00	7.00	4.0264	1.75121
	BE4	1.00	7.00	4.3708	1.61023
	BE5	1.00	7.00	5.1692	1.37308
	BE6	1.00	7.00	4.5568	1.44972
	BE7	1.00	7.00	4.5639	1.33157
	BE8	1.00	7.00	4.5356	1.36902
	BE9	1.00	7.00	4.5434	1.37902
SS Social Satisfaction	SS1	2.00	7.00	5.8459	1.16227
	SS2	2.00	7.00	5.7313	1.04694
	SS3	1.00	7.00	5.5376	1.23635
ES Economic Satisfaction	ES1	2.00	7.00	5.5132	1.10532
	ES2	2.00	7.00	5.6241	1.05007
	ES3	1.00	7.00	5.3371	1.35146