

## **A Holistic Framework of Corporate Website Favourability**

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## **A Holistic Framework of Corporate Website Favourability**

### **Abstract**

This paper extends the current knowledge of corporate website favourability (CWF) by developing a comprehensive conceptual model of its influence on corporate image, corporate reputation, loyalty and identification. The paper reviews previous studies on corporate websites from the perspectives of marketing, management, corporate identity and corporate visual identity in order to inform our understanding of the antecedents and consequences of CWF. The propositions and the conceptual framework present an approach by which a corporation can design and manage a favourable corporate website. A number of important contributions are offered: First, the paper adds to the understanding of CWF; second, it discusses the antecedents of CWF by drawing upon the existing literature; third, it is beneficial for practitioners in shaping CWF strategies, and fourth, it offers possible consequences of CWF and provides a framework for future testing.

**Keywords:** Corporate website, corporate website favourability, corporate image, corporate reputation, loyalty

## **Introduction**

The advances in Internet technology are the biggest distributed forceful source of information, which has experienced vast growth since its beginning. Therefore, the Internet has gained a vital role in many parts of our lives and has changed the expectations and patterns of web users, and transformed the way businesses attract consumers and retain existing customers (Lin, 2013). An increasing tendency is occurring towards creating a unique corporate website design for customers in order to gain a competitive advantage (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2017; 2019; Melewar et al., 2017). It helps to improve the integrated marketing communication strategies (Bellman and Rossiter, 2004). Furthermore, it contributes to improving customer relationships (Law et al., 2013), cost saving (Downes and Mui, 1998), enable innovation (Mandeville, 1998), project corporate identities of the company (Bravo et al., 2012; Bravo et al., 2013), manage image and reputation (Ageeva et al., 2018; Campbell and Beck, 2004; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017), increase loyalty (Srinivasan et al., 2002), and satisfaction (Ageeva et al., 2018; Casaló et al., 2008; Santouridis et al., 2009). This forms a greater need for corporations to design favourable websites in order to remain competitive (Cyr, 2008; Lin, 2013; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). It is crucial for successful e-businesses to develop a favourable website (Mary et al., 2008). When planning a website, corporations have many design concerns (Lin, 2013), and they should learn how to make an effective website to satisfy the expectations of customers.

Thus, during the past decade, practitioners and scholars alike have discussed that a crucial strategy for company success in the marketplace is the construction and maintenance of a favourable website (Ageeva et al., 2018; Chua et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2003; Palmer, 2002; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008) that can improve the image and reputation of the company and

impact on the consumer loyalty and identification (Ageeva et al., 2018; Campbell and Beck, 2004; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017).

Based on the above, the significance of corporate website favourability (CWF) has been recognised, however, there is still lack of research on the true meaning of the concept (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017). Ageeva et al. (2018) note that “there is a lack of research on corporate website favourability, and managers need to carefully organise the factors that impact on corporate website favourability” (p. 288). Thus, despite the importance of a favourable corporate website, previous literature (Ageeva et al., 2018; Al-Qeisi et al., 2014; Foroudi et al., 2017; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008; Melewar et al., 2017) suggests that there has been little systematic study of a favourable corporate website (i.e., CWF), its antecedents and consequences, in particular on corporate image, reputation, loyalty and identification.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the notion of corporate website favourability due to the drastic increase of interest in services from academics and practitioners in today’s global economy. The other aim is to examine the antecedents and consequences of the under-researched construct of corporate website favourability with particular attention paid to corporate image, corporate reputation, loyalty, and identification. In other words, the main problem is what are the dimensions of corporate website favourability as a domain specific construct, and what are its antecedents and consequences.

## **Literature review**

### ***Corporate website favourability (CWF)***

Corporate websites are mirrors for companies to reveal their corporate identities (Abdullah et

al., 2013; Bravo et al., 2012; Olins, 1989) and a status symbol for the organisation (White and Raman, 2000), an instrument to reflect a corporate image to signal its uniqueness (AbuGhazaleh et al., 2012), an indication of a company's corporate reputation (Argyriou et al., 2006), a major determinant for constructing online loyalty (Kabadayi and Gupta, 2011) and an instrument to bring the confidence to users, and, consequently enhance identification (Wang et al., 2006). Additionally, a corporate website projects corporate identity (Abdullah et al., 2013; Booth and Matic, 2011; Pollach, 2005), which is "the visual manifestation of the company's reality" (Argenti, 2007, p. 66) that is revealed through the organisation's logo, motto, name, and other tangible matters. Alhudaithy and Kitchen (2009, p. 58) noted that 'websites offer the opportunity for marketers to utilise a wide assortment of cues, such as colours, images and sounds to attract consumers' attention and generate favourable attitudes'.

A favourable website should be more than just attractive, it should be usable, and present valuable and serviceable information. Favourability represents a consumer's positive attitude towards the company (Suh and Amine, 2007) and is related to the taste of the audience (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Liu et al. (2000) found that a well-designed website would lead to a favourable attitude towards the site and its products. The favourability of a corporate website appeals to how consumers positively regard the corporate website. Corporate website favourability is defined as the extent to which a company projects its corporate identity through the corporate website, as a primary vehicle of corporate visual identity (Ageeva et al., 2018; Booth and Matic, 2011; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Melewar et al., 2017; Pollach, 2005).

### **Theoretical background and conceptual framework**

This study employs three major theories to develop the study's framework, namely,

attribution, signalling, and social identity theory (for more details, see Table 1). Based on these theories and the literature review above, eight constructs were chosen to represent the corporate website favourability for the current study, as shown in Figure 1, which represent the hedonic and utility features of the website.

< Insert Table 1 Here >

< Insert Figure 1 Here >

### ***Antecedents***

A significant number of online studies exist that can help identify the likely drivers of corporate website favourability (CWF). There is a body of literature that looks at website features (Chiou et al., 2010; Kim and Stoel, 2004) and website quality/dimensions/elements (Ageeva et al., 2018; Al-Qeisi et al., 2014; Cyr, 2008; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Santos, 2003; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). One of the first studies mainly focused on the quality of the e-commerce websites, such as WebQual (Barnes and Vidgen, 2003), usability, information quality and service interaction quality; e-SERVQUAL (Zeithaml et al., 2002) efficiency, reliability, fulfilment, and privacy; LibQual (Shorb and Driscoll, 2004), which was adapted for library websites; and E-S-QUAL (Parasuraman et al., 2005). In relation to the banking website literature, it is mainly based on Parasuraman et al. (1988) SERVQUAL scale (Arasli et al., 2005; Bravo et al., 2010), tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. In addition, the website design dimension from the designer's point of view described dimensions, such as some of the organisation of information and content, usability of the website and technical characteristics (availability, security and access speed) (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Cyr (2008) and Cyr and Head (2013) specified the design factors of corporate websites, such as information design, navigation

design and visual design. Similarly, Ageeva et al. (2018) found that favourable corporate website is influenced by usability, navigation, customer service, information and visual.

Additionally, some studies focus specifically focused on the technological aspects of the website in relation to the Internet banking adoption/ online banking features (Alsajjan and Dennis, 2010; George and Kumar, 2014; Kesharwani and Bisht, 2012; Santouridis et al., 2009; Yousafzai and Yani-de-Soriano, 2012). For example, Raman et al. (2008) propose six key elements – the degree of ease of use, appearance, reliability, customisation, communication and incentive aspects – that can evaluate consumer perceptions concerning the quality of e-services and Internet banking adoption. Based on these studies, the major focus was found to be on the security of the website (Angelakopoulos and Mihiotis, 2011; Sayar and Wolfe, 2007; White and Nteli, 2004) and perceived ease of use (usability) (George and Kumar, 2014; Kesharwani and Bisht, 2012).

Furthermore, several studies focus on corporate websites as a part of the communication of corporate identity (Abdullah et al., 2013; Cyr and Head, 2013; Bravo et al., 2012, 2013; Pollach, 2003). Some scholars highlighted that corporate culture is one of the most important factors that could influence favourability of the corporate website (Cyr and Head, 2013; Tsiriktsis, 2002), but this has not been empirically tested. As Want (2003) stated, a company's culture is now often communicated through its corporate website.

### ***Navigation design and corporate website favourability***

Palmer (2002) discovered that navigation design is essential for website success. Navigation design is defined as the navigation scheme that helps or obstructs the access to different parts of a website (Gefen et al., 2000), and, according to Tarafdar and Zhang (2008), it includes the

layout of the different elements of the website, such as hyperlinks and tabs, as well as ways in which these elements are arranged. Navigation design is one of the key elements of website design (Sterne, 1995) and is central for influencing customers (Kim et al., 2003). The navigation in this research is defined as the extent to which users can navigate the website and represents those characteristics that help users navigate the website better (Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013; Ganguly et al., 2010; Gefen et al., 2000; Keeney, 1999; Kumar et al., 2014; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008). In summary, corporate website favourability can attain its goals with the assistance of navigation design, which is a powerful source of influence. Therefore, as the results of these previously indicated studies show, the following can be assumed.

*P.1 The more favourably the navigation design is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

### ***Visual identity/design and corporate website favourability***

According to the literature, visual design/identity is one of the important elements of the favourable corporate website. According to Garrett (2003), some of the components of visual design are shapes, colours, photographs and font type. Similarly, elements, such as logo, colour, typeface, slogan and name, have commonly been mentioned by different authors as components of corporate visual identity (Dowling, 1994; Van den Bosch et al., 2006; Bartholme and Melewar, 2011). Visual identity makes an organisation visible and recognisable, by supplying people with extra signs to remember an organisation (Balmer and



Gray, 2000; Dowling, 1993; Van den Bosch et al., 2006). Moreover, the components of visual identity are connected to the uniformity of the overall view of the website and its emotional appeal (Garrett, 2003). In this study visual identity / design is defined as is the extent to which the company uses their ‘graphic design’ and ‘structure design’ to create the overall look and feel of the website for users (Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013; Ganguly et al., 2009; Garrett, 2003; Melewar et al., 2001; Wang and Emurian, 2005). Although research in this area is limited, in this study, it has been argued that visual design/identity will favourably affect corporate website favourability.

*P.2 The more favourably the visual identity/design is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

### ***Information design/content and corporate website favourability***

Information design is one of the important characteristics of the website (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Moreover, information design deals with the features of the website that express correct or incorrect information about services or products to a website customer (Cyr, 2008). In addition, information is defined as an essential step to satisfaction (DeWulf et al., 2006; Flavián et al., 2006; Szymanski and Hise, 2000). In fact, the information range has risen remarkably starting from basic web pages to dynamic audio and visual content (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008), which should be organised in a way that satisfies the users. According to the results of Cyr (2008), information can be an adequate element of website design to instil confidence in the website users’. This research refers to the information design/ content on the website as the quality of the content, the way it is arranged and how relevant it is to the purpose of the website (Bruce, 1998; Cyr, 2008; Cyr and Head, 2013; Ganguly et al., 2009; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008). In summary, information design is an important

characteristic of a website, and thus can favourably impact on corporate website favourability.

*P.3 The more favourably the information design/content is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

#### ***Usability and corporate website favourability***

Another important characteristic of the website is usability (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Usability (Doll et al., 1994; Nielsen, 2000) or ease of use (Eighmey and McCord, 1998) can be explained as the ease with which the website can be used. According to Tarafdar and Zhang (2008), usability relates to the extent to which a website is easy to use, challenging, visually appealing and fun, and the effective use of multimedia forms a significant aspect thereof. Usability essentially means that the website is natural and allows users to find what they are looking for rapidly and without effort (Lin, 2013). Moreover, usability of the website can help users to successfully reach their purpose connected to the website (Agarwal and Venkatesh, 2002). This study describes usability as the effort required to use the website, with which the user is capable of learning to manage the system with ease (Casalo et al., 2008; Davis, 1989; Flavian et al., 2006; Nielsen, 1994; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008).

*P.4 The more favourably the usability is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

#### ***Customisation and corporate website favourability***

The importance of customisation in the construction of corporate websites was highlighted by a number of studies (Kaynama and Black, 2000; Raman et al., 2008); Tarafdar and Zhang,

2008). Customisation is the ability of a company to personalise services and products for customers (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) described customisation as the extent to which a website can be customized to user needs. In addition, it was noticed that common features, such as customised website are affected favourably on both customer reputation (Srinivasan et al., 2002) and loyalty (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008; Srinivasan et al., 2002). In a customised website design, the use of graphic symbols could result in the greater customer connection with the company and impact user attitudes positively (Hershenson and Haber, 1965). In this research, customisation is the ability of a website to tailor products, services, and the transactional environment to individual customers (Fan et al., 2013; Kabadayi and Gupta, 2011; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008), which can bring strategic advantages to the company as a point of differentiation (Arora et al., 2008). Therefore:

*P.5 The more favourably the customisation is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

### ***Security and corporate website favourability***

The studies on Internet banking emphasise the importance of security features (Angelakopoulos and Mihiotis, 2011; Sayar and Wolfe, 2007; White and Nteli, 2004) “A majority of studies highlight the fact that “security” is the biggest single concern for customers when faced with the decision to use internet banking” (Sayar and Wolfe, 2007 p.125). Security is applied by providing users verified and safe transactions (Devaraj et al., 2002; Koufaris and Sosa, 2004) and describes the extent to which the website could be characterised as “safe” and has provisions for executing secure transactions (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Security refers to the degree to which the website can be perceived as safe and

has the necessary provisions for executing secure transactions (Devaraj et al., 2002; Koufaris and Sosa, 2004; McKnight et al., 2002; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005, 2008). Thus,

*P.6 The more favourably the security is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

#### ***Availability and corporate website favourability***

Tarafdar and Zhang (2008), and Alwi and Ismail (2013) highlighted the importance of the availability element of the website. According to Alwi and Ismail (2013), system availability is defined as “the correct technical functioning of the site”. In addition, Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) described it as the extent to which a website was easily available to users. Website accessibility or availability are important for sustained use of the website by browsers (Keeney, 1999). Availability refers to the correct technical performance of the website (Alwi and Ismail, 2013; Parasuraman et al., 2005; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). Consequently, the following proposition is made.

*P.7 The more favourably the availability is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website favourability.*

#### ***Corporate culture and corporate website favourability***

According to recent trends in information technology and Internet commerce, a company’s culture is now often communicated through its corporate website (Want, 2003). The corporate culture communicated on a website can influence the perceptions of viewers (Braddy et al., 2006; Overbeeke and Snizek, 2005). Furthermore, companies communicate their culture through their websites (Overbeeke and Snizek, 2005; Want, 2003). Furthermore,

according to Kiriakidou and Millward (2000) and Melewar (2003), the culture of a company plays an essential part in the improvement of its corporate identity.

Dowling (1986) defined corporate culture as a company's common beliefs, behaviour, values and described that it is the 'what' of a company (Melewar, 2003). According to Melewar (2003), there are a number of essential elements of the corporate culture, such as 1) corporate values, 2) corporate mission, 3) corporate guidelines, 4) corporate principles, 5) corporate history, 6) corporate philosophy, and 7) the founder of the company. In this research, perceived corporate culture is defined as the consumers' perceptions about the corporate values, corporate philosophy, corporate mission, corporate principles, corporate history, founder of the company, country of origin and company's subculture resulting from its corporate identity (Cui and Hu, 2012; Melewar, 2003; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Despite the highlighted importance of corporate culture in relation to the website, it has not been empirically tested. In summary, perceived corporate culture is a powerful source of influence assisting with corporate website. Therefore, it is proposed:

*P.8 The more favourable the corporate culture is perceived by consumers, the more favourable the attitude consumers have towards the corporate website.*

### ***Consequences***

A favourable corporate website can lead to number of positive outcomes for the company. A common view is that a corporate website is a communication channel that companies employ to reveal their identity, to manage external impressions of the firm (Abdullah et al., 2013; Bravo et al., 2012; Bourlakis et al., 2010), an instrument to reflect a corporate image, to signal its uniqueness (AbuGhazaleh et al., 2012; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008; White and Raman, 2000), an indication of a company's corporate reputation (Arguriou et al., 2006), a

major determinant of constructing online loyalty (Kabadayi and Gupta, 2011), an instrument to bring the confidence to users, and, consequently, enhance loyalty and identification (Wang et al., 2006).

Corporate websites have emerged as a powerful instrument to promote corporate identities and build relationships with audiences (Ageeva et al., 2018; Booth and Matic, 2011; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Pollach, 2005). Hence, a favourable corporate website can lead to enhancing corporate image (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Okazaki, 2006) and improving reputation (Abdullah et al., 2013; Ageeva et al., 2018; Bravo et al., 2012; Bravo et al., 2013; Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017) as well as promoting loyalty and increasing identification (Ageeva et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2017; Hillenbrand and Money, 2006; Melewar et al., 2017). Several comprehensive reviews of the notion of corporate websites reveal significant ambiguity and the multifaceted nature of the concept (Abdullah et al., 2013; Argyriou et al., 2006; Bravo et al., 2012; White and Raman, 2000). According to Steinbtuck et al. (2002), the images and visual design of the website are strongly connected to satisfaction (Vance et al., 2008). Boros (2009) finds that there is a positive relation between a company's reputation and identification. Similarly, according to Fuller et al. (2006) and Smidts et al. (2001), a company's external reputation positively affects its identification. Furthermore, Casaló et al. (2008) observe that one of the factors identifying loyalty is reputation.

### ***Corporate website favourability and corporate image***

The most important objective of a corporate website is to promote the corporate image because the website can be seen as the virtual storefront of the company (Argyriou et al., 2006; Pitt and Papania, 2007; Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009). Corporate image is the overall

immediate impression left in the minds of customers in comparison to its competitors and represents an asset, which allows companies to differentiate and increase the chances of success (Balmer et al., 2011; Bravo et al., 2009; Foroudi et al., 2014, 2016; Gray and Balmer, 1998; Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011; Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986; Richard and Zhang, 2012; Williams and Moffit, 1997; Zimmer and Golden, 1988). O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) stated that an "image influences attitudes toward its products" (p. 56). Image has an external foundation since it refers to how the public perceives an organisation and/or its selling elements (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Kotler, 1997). Therefore, a website enables a company to build an image of itself in the consumer's mind (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). In other words, when consumers have a positive attitude towards a corporate website, they have a more favourable image of the company. A company's website can promote a long-term favourable corporate image and corporate reputation (Van Riel et al., 2001). Therefore, the favourability of the image consumers hold about an organisation impacts on their attitudes and behaviours (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). This study applies attribution theory on corporate website studies. Given previous research, it is likely that if consumers have a positive image of a company, it will positively affect their feelings and evaluations of the company and the company's reputation will improve (Walsh et al., 2009).

*P.9 The more favourable the attitude that consumers have towards a company's corporate website favourability, the more favourable the image of the company among consumers.*

### ***Corporate image and corporate reputation***

The debate about the conceptualisation of corporate reputation has been on the agenda of marketing academics and practitioners for the past five decades (Dowling, 2001; Markwick and Fill, 1997), in which the terms 'corporate identity' and 'corporate image' have been used interchangeably with 'corporate reputation'. In addition, researchers have adopted different,

sometimes even contradictory definitions for the concept in a business context. Reputation is defined as the way in which companies are seen from the outside, whereas identity refers to something built up within a company (Balmer, 1995; Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Olins, 1989). Herbig et al. (1994) claimed that corporate reputation represents an image endowed with a judgment and is underpinned by an entity's willingness and ability to consistently undergo an activity or action. Corporate reputation concerns a judgement that results from the reception of direct and indirect experiences and information of a company over time (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Foroudi et al., 2014, 2016; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Gray and Balmer, 1998; Herbig et al., 1994; Markwick and Fill, 1997; Ruth and York, 2004; Yoon et al., 1993).

Marketing studies view the corporate image and/or corporate reputation as indicating that corporate reputation is perceived as a dynamic concept, which takes time to build and manage (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001). Corporate image affects corporate reputation (Balmer, 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001) and it has been argued that corporate reputation is the stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication, and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals. Thus, a corporation can improve its corporate reputation when it constructs and communicates its identity to its main stakeholders (Dowling, 2004). An enduring, favourable corporate image ensures a favourable reputation and develops a positive attitude in the stakeholders towards the organisation (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997).

*P.10 The more favourable the attitude that consumers have towards a company's corporate image, the more favourable the reputation of the company among consumers.*



### ***Corporate reputation and loyalty***

According to Srinivasan et al. (2002), a favourable reputation can be constructed and strengthened by a website. A positive reputation among users can be built with the help of an original website design; this is favourably related to word-of-mouth and willingness to pay more, and, thus, intertwined with loyalty (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Website loyalty is characterised as the possibility of the same user revisiting the website (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996). Recent research defines online loyalty or loyalty as the ‘consumer’s intention to buy’ from a website such that she/he will not switch to another website (Flavián et al., 2006). This research defines loyalty as the consumer's psychological attachment and intention to continue doing business with the company, expressed over time, where several alternatives are available (Bergeron, 2001; Gefen, 2002; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Liang and Wang, 2008; Melewar et al., 2017; Zeithaml et al., 1996). The present study, in accordance with the literature, contends that successful corporate reputation can be one of the main contributing factors to the creation of loyalty.

*P.11 The more favourable the attitude that consumers have towards a company’s corporate reputation, the more loyal consumers are towards the company.*

### ***Loyalty and identification***

Identification can be defined as an integral part of the sense of satisfaction in being an employee of a successful organisation (Kim et al., 2001) and a measurement of loyalty (Mael and Tetrick, 1992). When a person identifies with an organisation, they become loyal. According to Patchen (1970), identification involves loyalty or some similar characteristic. This is supported by Lee (1971) and Cheney (1983), who claim that organisational identification consists of (a) feelings of solidarity; (b) the support of the organisation; and (c) perceptions of shared characteristics. The importance attached to identification, discussed by

numerous authors, is defined from two different standpoints – the organisations (Glynn, 2000; Labianca et al., 2001) and individuals (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Haslam, 2001). Thus, organisational identification is described as “the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21).

A similar perspective comes from Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) and Smidts et al. (2001), who define organisational identification as a feeling of belonging with the organisation, and personal identification with a group (Polzer, 2004; Stoel, 2002). In contrast, Podnar et al. (2011) characterise a company as an object of identification, as noted by Siegel and Sisaye (1997), who define organisational identification as a connection between employees’ self-image and the corporate image. Similarly, He and Mukherjee (2009: page number?) define organisational identification as ‘the degree of overlap of self-identity and organisational identity’. In this study, identification represents the strong social relationships between the consumer and the company, such that consumers perceive themselves by the same attributes that they believe define the company (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994; Homburg et al., 2009; Knight and Haslam, 2010; Marin and De Maya, 2013; Rooney et al., 2010). Patchen (1970) noted the relationship between loyalty and identification and concluded that identification contains loyalty. Therefore:

*P.12 The more loyal consumers are towards the company, the more they identify themselves with that company.*

### ***Mediators***

By reviewing the literature, satisfaction and attractiveness are proposed as the mediators. The importance of satisfaction has been highlighted in the works of traditional service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985) as well as in the online context in particular (Cheung and Lee,

2005 Santouridis et al., 2009). Santouridis et al. (2009) highlighted the significance of satisfaction in the Internet services. In general terms, satisfaction is defined in the work of Flavian et al. (2006) as an affective consumer condition that results from a global evaluation of all the aspects that make up the consumer relationship (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Satisfaction shows a favourable attitude of the consumer. User satisfaction depends on website features (Doll and Torkzadeh, 1988). In addition, Yoon (2002) established that satisfaction could be a result of navigation design (Cyr, 2008). In this study, satisfaction is defined as the consumers' evaluations of a product or service with regard to their needs and expectations (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Flavian et al., 2006; Law and Bai, 2008; Oliver, 1980). According to Steinbtuck et al. (2002) images and visual design of the website is strongly connected to satisfaction (Vance et al., 2008).

*P.13 The more favourable the attitudes that consumers have towards a company's corporate website, the more consumers are satisfied with the company.*

*P.14 The more satisfied the consumers are with a company's corporate website, the more favourable the image of the company among consumers.*

The notion of attractiveness was extensively explored in the recruitment literature in terms of the colours, fonts, pictures, and bulleted versus paragraphs of text of the recruitment websites (Braddy et al., 2003; Braddy et al., 2008). According to Braddy et al. (2008), organisational attractiveness perceptions are affected by their viewing of organisational recruitment websites. Thompson, Braddy, and Wuensch (2008), and Tversky and Kahneman (1973) noted that website attractiveness matters to job applicants. This reinforces the concept proposed by previous studies (Gatewood et al., 1993) that job applicants are more attracted to companies for whom they have a positive regard. In this study attractiveness is defined as how exciting, attractive, appealing, fun and subjectively pleasing the company is in the mind

of consumers (Alwi and Ismail, 2013; Cao et al., 2005; Tractinsky et al., 2006). Thus, it may lead to an organisation being viewed more favourably when it maintains an attractive website (Braddy et al., 2008) (Figure 1). This leads to the following propositions:

*P.15 The more favourable the attitudes that consumers have towards a company's corporate website, the more consumers are attracted towards the company.*

*P.16 The more consumers are attracted towards a company's website, the more favourable the image of the company among consumers.*

## **Conclusion**

Based on the development of the corporate website favourability, its antecedents and consequences in the previous sections, this paper makes four important contributions. (1) First, the paper extends our current understanding of the factors that impact CWF and provides a discussion not found so far in the literature, thus extending our knowledge of the subject of CWF. (2) Second, the study highlights the antecedents of CWF, identified by drawing on the existing literature relating to marketing, management, corporate identity and corporate website. (3) Third, along with the antecedents, the CWF framework developed in this study proposes the potential consequences of the CWF construct, and the inclusion of both antecedents and consequences enables us to develop a framework of CWF for future testing. (4) Finally, this paper enables us to address a problem of relevance and interest to academics, general managers and practitioners alike. Although the proposed research framework has not yet been empirically tested, the findings will be of managerial and academic relevance, in that they are useful in the development of favourable corporate websites, which enhance corporate image, corporate reputation perceptions, loyalty and

identification.

This study will be beneficial for general managers who are very important for shaping the company's website strategies as they are well placed to take an organisation-wide viewpoint and are aware of the external environment of the organisation. This study is based on multi-disciplinary approach and it illustrates that to create a favourable corporate website enhances corporate image, corporate reputation perceptions, loyalty and identification. The propositions and the conceptual framework present an approach with which a corporation can design and manage a favourable corporate website. It is hoped that this investigation will make a considerable managerial contribution to the understanding of general managers, graphic designers, and decision-makers about the whole relationship between corporate website favourability, its antecedents and its main consequences. A clear understanding of the nature of the relevant concepts can help cross-functional managers and designers to devise corporate websites, which are likely to advance a favourable corporate reputation, loyalty and identification. As well as contributing to the literature on corporate websites by clarifying the concept of corporate website favourability, it specifies its antecedents and consequences, and examines the corporate website favourability construct. In addition, it also adds to the current state of knowledge in management and marketing research to establish the dimensions of a corporate website. However, as this framework was not empirically tested, further research is required. In addition, depending on the empirical setting, the findings could vary in different countries. Therefore, additional research is needed to test the framework empirically in various countries.

Future studies should investigate whether the device accessing the website has any affect on the users, for instance with security or any of the other variables in the framework, as

consumers use several devices to access the Internet in general. Therefore, including some moderating variables such as device or screen size would be important to include. Another potential of the framework is to extend it into other digital areas, such as social media websites where more interaction between stakeholders takes place.

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**Table 1: Underlying theories**

Theory	Description	This study
<b>Signalling theory</b>	In recent years, a number of studies have used the signalling theory in the online context (Braddy et al., 2006; 2008; Gregory et al., 2013). According to Connelly et al. (2011) the, “Signalling theory focuses primarily on the deliberate communication of positive information in an effort to convey positive organisational attributes” (p.44). In addition, Braddy et al. (2006) stated that organisations provide their information on the website in the hope that potential consumers favourably view the organisation as a potential employer. According to Gregory et al. (2013), who used the signalling theory in their study, website design and website context will positively affect the attitude towards the website and organisation. Furthermore, Braddy et al. (2008) stated that consumers’ ratings of organisation favourability, overall image as an employer, and attractiveness as an employer will change after their exploration of an organisation’s recruitment website.	Based on the description, a corporate website, by providing the cues about the nature of an organisation, can influence the perception of the viewers of the organisation (Braddy et al., 2008) and create a positive impression, which is needed to maintain a favourable image (Gatewood et al., 1993).
<b>Attributional Theory</b>	Markwick and Fill (1997) pointed out that corporate identity is portrayed to stakeholders by using a number of cues, which can be arranged so that intentionally planned messages are presented to certain target audiences to reach particular objectives, and characterise how the organisation would like to be perceived. The most important objective of a corporate website is to promote the corporate image because the website can be seen as the virtual storefront of the company (Argyriou et al., 2006; Halliburton and Ziegfeld, 2009). Therefore, a website enables a company to build an image of itself in the consumer’s mind (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2008). In other words, when consumers have positive attitudes towards a corporate website, they have a more favourable image about the company. This statement is constructed based on the attribution theory (Graham, 1991; Weiner, 1992). The attribution theory refers to “the perception or inference of cause” (Kelley and Michela, 1980, p. 458), how individuals succeed or fail at dynamic interactions, and what causes the inferences they make about the particular behaviours (Kelley and Michela, 1980).	The favourability of the image consumers hold about an organisation impact on their attitudes and behaviours (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). This study applies the attribution theory on corporate website studies. The attribution theory states that an individuals’ view about the failure or success of another person can be attributed to another individual’s behaviour (Weiner, 1986). This statement verifies that a company’s website can promote a long-term favourable corporate image, corporate reputation (Van Riel et al., 2001), consumer identification and loyalty, the set of internal and external communicational properties of a website can influence an individual’s understanding and interpretation thereof.
<b>Social identity theory</b>	Nowadays, businesses seek to further establish why and under what circumstances consumers develop meaningful relationships with specific companies. Marketers make efforts to sustain these relationships through consumer equity and intimacy (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). To achieve this, companies must satisfy consumers’ needs relative to their	Organisational communications present organisational images, and use the corporate website to improve the attractiveness and distinctiveness of those images for external and internal audiences. In

	<p>social identity. Companies must communicate images relevant to the consumer. To measure how outsiders view the company members use the organisation's image (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994). Marketing researchers (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Karaosmanoglu et al., 2011) have studied identity from the standpoints of external audiences, using the social identity theory. The efficient management of corporate identity leads to a favourable corporate image. An enduring, favourable corporate image ensures a favourable reputation and develops a positive attitude in stakeholders towards the organisation (Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Van Riel and Balmer, 1997).</p>	<p>addition, organisations create and design a corporate website as a visible manifestation of a leader's vision: a well-designed corporate website helps cross-functional managers to improve visibility among the stakeholders of an organisation. Organisations invest substantial amounts of money in implementing and developing a corporate website and expect important benefits therefrom. A corporate website, is a primary vehicle for corporate visual identity (CVI) and plays an important role in the way that an organisation portrays itself to internal and external stakeholders (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Van den Bosch et al., 2006).</p>
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Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

