

# **THE RELEVANCE OF PARTICIPATION BEHAVIOR, ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT, AND ATTITUDINAL LOYALTY TO THE MANAGEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper studies participation behavior, organizational commitment, perceived value and attitudinal loyalty as psychological and behavioral antecedents of the intention to use the services offered by professional associations to their members. For this purpose, an empirical study was conducted and the technique used was partial least squares (PLS). The findings highlight the importance of membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty which have a sequential mediating effect on the relationship between perceived value and intention to use. This study contributes to the literature on professional associations, due to the scarce research on the relationships between psychological and behavioral variables linked to the member-association relationship. Additionally, to date, the constructs involved had not been integrated into a comprehensive research framework in the field of professional associations. The implications for management are the new ways to improve the intention to use the services of professional associations suggested by our findings.

## **Key words**

Professional associations, organizational commitment, participation behavior, attitudinal loyalty, perceived value, membership.

## **1. Introduction**

Organizations that make up the nonprofit sector play an important role in modern economies and their growth is attracting the interest of numerous researchers (Kim &

Kim, 2015; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016; Wang & Ki, 2018; Weisbrod, 1997).

All nonprofit organizations, in general, can benefit significantly from marketing input and strategies (Shoham, et al., 2006). Professional associations represent a large subset of the global non-profit sector, however, little literature has focused on how to manage them (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014). Nevertheless, due to their structure and peculiarities, they can be especially favored by marketing-oriented studies (Gruen et al., 2000)

A professional association is an organization of competent professionals seeking common advancement (Merton, 1958). The membership dues allow members to enjoy the services that the association offers (e.g., members can use the services, such as the use of a website, reading magazines and attending training programs, local meetings, etc.) and thereby achieve both personal and professional benefits (e.g., employment opportunities, the establishment of a code of ethics, being informed about trends in the industry, etc.) (Ki & Wang, 2016).

As continuing professional development is critical for all professionals, when members of professional associations join, they demonstrate their commitment to professional competence (Hammond and Moore, 2018). Leahy (2004) even argues that since professional associations are a driver of the profession, an "active" membership is essential. Therefore, if it is important to promote membership retention, it is even more important that members use the associations' services.

Some scholars have investigated the motivations, factors and barriers to membership in an association (e.g., Knoke, 1988; Gruen, 1994; Willems & Dury, 2017), but few have conducted empirical studies linking member behaviors and psychological antecedents related to the member-association relationship (Wang & Ki, 2018). Ki and Wang (2016), Markova, et al. (2013), and Saitgalina (2018) relate member satisfaction to their retention or recommendation behaviors to others. Gruen et al. (2000) investigated the effect of

commitment on member retention and Wang and Ki (2018) studied the relationship between member attitudes toward their association and their volunteering and giving behaviors. Farina (2016) argued that perceived value influences member retention. Additionally, Revilla et al. (2015) pointed out that most of the research on the relationship between participatory behavior and organizational commitment has been conducted at the level of employees rather than customers. Now, we can also extend this to the association's members. Finally, no empirical research has been found relating psychological and behavioral variables to intention to use.

Considering that members' psychological ties to the professional association are decisive for a successful and mutually beneficial relationship (Annakili & Jayam, 2018; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995) and the fact that the combination of perception, attitude, and behavior is highly beneficial when combined in accordance with the organization's goals (Aboazoum et al., 2015), we design our study.

This paper studies participation behavior, organizational commitment, perceived value, attitudinal loyalty, and intention to use in the field of professional associations. To date, these concepts have not been integrated into a comprehensive research framework in the field of professional associations. Therefore, this study makes a new contribution to the scarce literature on the relationships between psychological variables and behavioral variables linked to the member-association relationship.

Consequently, the theoretical relevance of this study derives from its contribution to the literature that provides new knowledge on the relationships between variables of a different nature and their relationship with the intention to use the services offered by professional associations. The main contributions to the literature are (1) the incorporation of member participation behavior, rather than customer or employee participation behavior that has often been used in the literature, (2) the inclusion of

relationships between psychological and behavioral variables linked in the member-association relationship, (3) the integration of constructs such as participation behavior, perceived value, membership commitment, attitudinal loyalty, and intention to use in a single integrative research framework in the field of professional associations, (4) the consideration of the relationship of previous variables and the intention to use, and (5) discussing the mediating role of membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty in the perceived value-intention to use relationship.

In addition, the study model focuses on the intention to use the services offered by the association, which is critical to the success of the association and to professional development. This research also has important implications for the management of professional associations. Collecting several of the antecedents of behavioral loyalty and their relationships provides managers with new ways to improve the intention to use their services. Managers will therefore have the opportunity to develop strategies to act on the various antecedents to enhance the professional development.

The article starts with a revision of the literature on the constructs and their possible relationships. In the second section the empirical research is explained and the third section shows the discussion of the results. The paper ends with the conclusions, limitations and future research.

## **2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development**

### **2.1. Participation behavior and perceived value**

The effort, preferences, knowledge, or other of the services that the consumer deploys for the development, production, delivery, or recovery of the service is considered customer participation behavior (Dong and Sivakumar 2017). Some customers become more than just information providers, considering them as co-producers or “partial employees”

(Claycomb et al., 2001; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Literature shows three levels of participation: attendant, information provider and co-producer; therefore, customer participation is necessary to achieve adequate value co-creation performance (Yi & Gong, 2013; Thuy, 2016) and sometimes effective service delivery requires co-production (Claycomb et al., 2001). Following Yi and Gong (2013), we can find two dimensions of customer value co-creation behavior: customer participation behavior and customer citizenship behavior (i.e., extra-role behavior). The former refers to customer in-role behavior, concerning customers' co-creation of products or services together with the company, the latter refers to the extra effort customers make to interact with and contribute to the organization. This study focuses on the first one, namely, participation behavior.

Given the purpose of our research, we conceptualize member participation as a behavioral construct that measures the degree to which members provide information, make suggestions, and become involved in decision making during the process of providing the services that the professional association offers them.

On the other hand, perceived value has been defined as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14), and has been recognized as one of the most important ways to gain competitive advantage (Parasuraman, 1997; Sánchez & Iniesta, 2007; Ullah, 2021).

The trend that emerged with market orientation from the 1990s promoted a growing focus on the 'value' of the customer. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) defended the market-oriented culture of companies as the basis for creating value for the customer, which would allow them to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and, consequently, better performance (Castro et al., 2005). Consequently, creating customer

value became a strategic imperative to build and maintain competitive advantage and attracted great interest in both academia and industry (Correa et al., 2021; Sánchez & Iniesta, 2007; Tran & Vu, 2021).

In particular, Co-creation literature advocates that customers are treated as critical resources in the value creation process (Cossío et al., 2016), where together with the firm, value is created (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Therefore, dialogue and interaction, typical behaviors of customer participation, are considered the foundations for generating value (Payne et al., 2008). Under this approach, Chan et al. (2010) empirically tested the customer participation-perceived value in the financial sector and explained that the customers can create value through their participation in three ways: better service quality, personalized service, and greater control. Many other researchers have verified this relationship in different contexts (e.g., Dong et al., 2008; Kim & Tang, 2020; Thuy, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017).

In the field of professional associations, membership turns out to be a sign of recognition by colleagues and the association allows its members to express themselves and share positive feelings about the profession (Messmer 2005). The possibility of relationships between different types of members of an organization and/or with the organization itself (Bae, 2021), the relation between member participation behavior and the quality of their relationship in professional associations (Gruen et al., 2000), and the literature provided, lead us to propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Participation behavior is positively related to perceived value.

## **2.2. Participation behavior and organizational commitment**

Organizational commitment is the degree to which the employee identifies with a particular organization and its objectives, and wishes to remain a member of the

organization (Robbin & Judge, 2013). It has been widely studied in the field of management (Botella-Carrubi & Tudela-Torras, 2020; Singh & Gupta, 2015, Cohen, 2017, Al-Jabari, 2019) and has been traditionally linked to the organization 's employees (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Sungu, Weng, & Xu, 2019). In this sense, González-Cruza et al. (2019) suggest that leaders must consider the circumstances of followers in order to adapt a leadership style.

In our paper, we go further and propose to use this construct in the field of professional associations, linking organizational commitment to the members of the association. Therefore, we adapt the general definition of membership commitment of “the degree of the membership’s psychological attachment to the association” (Gruen et al., 2000, p. 37). The membership is the sense of belonging to a group and the sense of personal connection with others in the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Commitment is a psychological state that favors the individual's willingness to make a considerable effort in favor of the organization (Angle & Perry, 1981; Lim et al., 2017), due to emotional ties related to the feeling of pride in being a member of the organization. This commitment is in line with the affective facet of the commitment (Porter et al., 1974). However, the most widespread theory on organizational commitment is based on the proposal of Meller and Allen (Allen & Meller, 1990 and Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997) of three components: affective, normative and continuity (Lim et al., 2017; Loan, 2020; Singh & Gupta, 2015; Verma, 2020).

Affective commitment measures the feelings and emotional attachments, it is the one that brings the greatest benefit to the organization, and it is also related to desirable behavior (Fernández et al., 2016; Singh & Gupta, 2015; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). The normative commitment is related to individual values such as obedience, caution and formality. The expected standards of behavior or social norms push permanence in the

organization (Annakili & Jayam, 2018; Bayona et al., 1999). The commitment to continuity is based on the individual's assessment of the effort, time and resources invested in him/her so far and the loss of the investment and the status achieved if he/she abandons it (Cakı et al., 2015; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

After detailing many of the studies that verified the relationship between employee participation and organizational commitment, Annakili and Jayam (2018) also proved it and even requested the government to propose an ordinance that favors the participation of employees in order to improve society. Ahmed (2020) and Kumar et al. (2021) found empirical support for this relationship in the hotel industry and the public sector, respectively. The theory of social exchange finds the basis to explain this mechanism in the exchange of socio-emotional benefits. When employees have the opportunity to express their opinions on work matters, they feel important and their esteem is strengthened, therefore, they tend to maintain a long-term relationship (Lew, 2009; Wayne et al., 1997).

Marketing starts from the literature on psychology of organizational behavior to incorporate commitment in its research (Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). Consequently, Ulrich (1989) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) argued the positive impact of customer participation on their commitment. In the context of virtual communities, Gupta and Kim (2007) proved how “encouraging participation among customers is the springboard for customer commitment” (p. 28). However, Revilla et al. (2015) pointed out that since customer behavior is so important in a service delivery, it is strange that research has focused so little on customers compared to employees.

Meanwhile, professional associations perform functions that are especially important in times of uncertainty, such as fostering interaction and learning among their members, as



well as, discussing best practices, norms and values of the profession (Sherrill et al., 2022).

These arguments from the literature and taking into account that the quality of the relationship influences the degree of commitment (Bae, 2021) and that the participation of the members in the production of the association's services determines the quality of the relationship (Gruen et al., 2000), we state the following hypothesis:

H2: Participation behavior is positively related to membership commitment.

### **2.3. Perceived value and intention to use**

Marketing efforts focus on customer loyalty (Dick & Basu 1994; Watson et al., 2015), due to the benefits that it gives to companies, such as higher income, purchasing additional products, generating new business through recommendations or reduction of costs. These benefits have been widely documented in the literature to assert that customer loyalty gives companies a sustainable competitive advantage and becomes a key element to a company's success (Arslan, 2020; Cossío et al., 2016; Fitriani *et al.*, 2020; Plassmann et al., 2007; Setó, 2012).

Although there is no general consensus on the definition and operationalization of loyalty, the current literature seems to advocate considering both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (Azzam & Harsono, 2021; Watson *et al.*, 2015; Yao et al., 2019). While attitudinal loyalty measures the psychological attachment and attitudinal advocacy that customers have toward a brand, behavioral loyalty refers to intention to repurchase or use (Lee & Wong, 2021; Perera et al., 2019).

Marketers seek to enhance the purchase or use intention of customers (Agarwal & Teas, 2001; Konuk, 2018), due to the fact that being willing to continue using a service is a key factor for success (Chen & Lin, 2019).

We have already pointed out that professional associations need active membership to enhance the profession (Leahy, 2004). Therefore, intention to use the association services becomes an important goal for associations. Furthermore, Gruen et al. (2000) assert that the level at which members use the association's services (i.e., behavioral loyalty) influences the quality of the membership; and enhancing the quality of the membership is a goal of relationship marketing. Consequently, for professional associations, it is important to find out what drives the member's intention to use their services.

If perceived value is low, customers feel the need to seek out competing firms that increase value, whereas if perceived value is high, the consumer does not feel that need (Chang et al., 2009). Therefore, perceived value becomes essential to ensure that customers intend to regularly use services from the same provider (Correa et al., 2021; Karjaluoto et al., 2019).

Despite the empirical evidence of the perceived value-intention to use relationship (e.g., Correa et al., 2021; Dodds et al., 1991; Konuk, 2018; Liljander et al., 2009; Pham et al., 2018; Tran & Vu, 2021), De Morais et al. (2020) once again underline the relevance of this research.

Specifically, professional associations have their own particular characteristics that distinguish them from other types of organizations and allow them to offer tangible and symbolic benefits to attract members and retain them as members (i.e., renew membership); hence, members are like consumers when they use the services of professional associations and will value them in order to decide to renew their membership and continue using the services or not (Markova et al. 2013).

These arguments from the literature help in framing the following hypothesis:

H3. Perceived value is positively related to intention to use.

## **2.4. Perceived value and commitment**

Relationship Marketing literature understands customer commitment as the enduring desire to maintain a valuable relationship (Moorman et al., 1992). It is durable and positively valued, implying that there are mutual benefits and that the parties are willing to incur costs to continue the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma & Patterson, 2000). Consequently, commitment becomes a critical component of successful customer relations (Kungumapriya & Malarmathi, 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Shaikh et al., 2015; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018).

Relationship marketing has also driven the identification of marketing outcomes, such as loyalty, and their drivers, such as commitment and perceived value, as well as the understanding of the causal relationships of its drivers, with the objective of developing the most appropriate market action strategies (Sayil et al., 2019). Hence, many researchers have proved the relation between perceived value and commitment (e.g., Hai et al., 2020; Karjaluoto et al., 2019; Kungumapriya & Malarmathi, 2018; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). Professional associations compete for the commitment, time and financial support of professionals, and in this competition, member appreciation plays a key role (Markova et al. 2013).

Hence, we hypothesize the findings in the context of professional associations as follows:

H4: Perceived value is positively related to membership commitment.

## **2.5. Organizational commitment and attitudinal loyalty**

Attitudinal loyalty indicates the likelihood of retaining or willingness to recommend a product, brand, or service to others and captures the affective and cognitive aspects of loyalty (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Srivastava & Kaul, 2016).

While traditional Human Resource literature has considered this indicator as a simple concept, Marketing has prompted to consider the composite view of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. A 'true' loyal customer is the one with high attitude and high repurchase to a brand (Dick & Basu, 1994), therefore, it is necessary to include the underlying attitudinal aspects that drive customer behavior to build 'true' customer loyalty (Kumar & Shah, 2004; Watson et al., 2015).

On the other hand, traditional Human Resource literature has more focused on economic incentives than psychological incentives to analyze employee loyalty, while marketing literature has considered organizational commitment, as a psychological factor, to achieve organizational loyalty (MacKenzie et al., 1998; Sabir et al., 2021; Verma, 2020; Yang, 2012; Yao et al., 2019). Therefore, commitment is a critical component of successful customer relations (Kungumapriya & Malarmathi, 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Shaikh et al., 2015; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018).

In this regard, Azzam and Harsono (2021), Izogo (2015), and Yao et al. (2019) empirically verified the commitment-attitudinal loyalty relationship, and Wu and Liu (2014) studied the effect of affective commitment on attitudinal loyalty. Shukla et al. (2016) also investigated attitudinal loyalty (i.e., advocacy intention) and its relationship with the three types of commitment.

Pursuant to Gruen et al. (2000), we consider the bond of the organizational commitment with employee outcomes to be analogous to that of the membership commitment and their outcomes, such as attitudinal loyalty. By clearly identifying the role of each member in an association and enhancing their commitment, the association can gain a competitive advantage through member loyalty.

In particular, Ki and Cho (2020) advocate that among the forms of professional association support, one should consider the contribution of their members in the form of

money (i.e., donations or dues), time (i.e., volunteering), and, in addition, the recommendation of membership to colleagues. In this way, professional associations expand the size of the membership population. Consequently, they argue that membership commitment is related to attitudinal loyalty.

We therefore propose that:

H5: Membership commitment is positively related to attitudinal loyalty

## **2.6. Attitude loyalty and intention to use**

Initially, marketing literature only investigated behavioral loyalty, through indicators such as the intention to use, proportion of purchases, purchase frequency or purchase sequence (Perera et al., 2019; Senić & Marinković, 2014). However, Dick and Basu (1994) were forceful in proposing the need to consider both favorable attitudes and repurchase to define loyalty. In addition, Oliver (1999) defined loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future” (p.34). This definition suggests the two categories of loyalty: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Day (1969) could be the first author to consider the composite view of loyalty, explaining that repurchase could be motivated by situational demands rather than by a positive attitude toward the brand, and that could lead to "false loyalty". In this sense, Reichheld (2003) argued that the customer could simply be inert or indifferent or that switching costs could be high; therefore, behavioral loyalty alone seems insufficient to capture what is called “true” loyalty (Kumar & Shah, 2004; Watson *et al.*, 2015)

On the other hand, given that attitudinal loyalty measures the psychological attachment and attitudinal advocacy that customers have toward a brand, attitudinal loyalty is a step beyond behavioral loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Lee & Wong, 2021). Moreover, attitude is considered a predictor of behavior by the theory of attitude–behavior

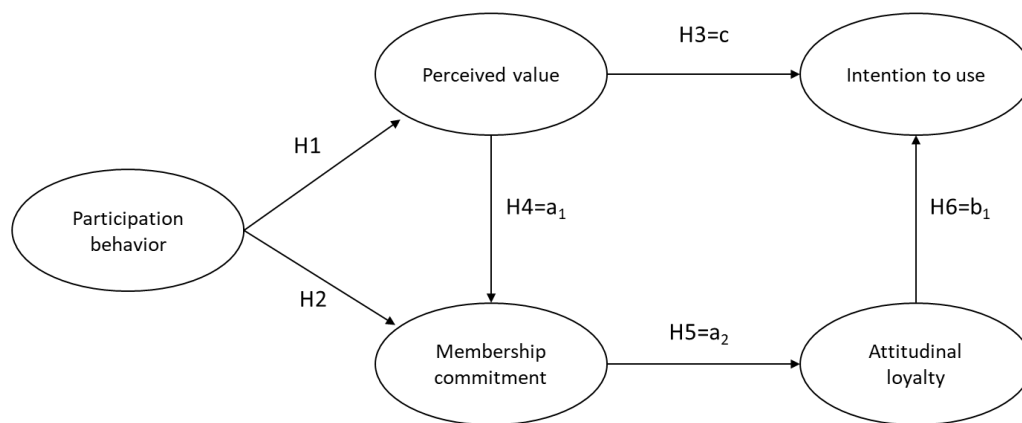
consistency (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006), consequently some marketing academics have empirically verified the effect of attitudinal loyalty on behavioral loyalty (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007). It was especially since the study of Dick and Basu (1994) that research on the causality of the attitude-behavior relationship increased.

The studies of Azzam and Harsono (2021), Lee and Wong (2021), Perera et al. (2019), Senić and Marinković (2014), Watson *et al.* (2015), and Yao et al. (2019) verified the relation between attitudinal loyalty and intention to use or repurchase.

On the basis of the above theoretical underpinnings, the following hypothesis is proposed:  
H6. Attitudinal loyalty is positively related to intention to use.

Based on the review literature the proposed research model shown in figure 1

Figure 1. Proposed model



H7= Perceived value -> Intention to use (Via Membership commitment and Attitudinal loyalty -> Intention to use =  $a_1 + a_2 \cdot b_1$ )

### 3. Empirical study

Next, we present the main characteristics of the empirical study, focusing on the methods of information collection, the design of the measurement instruments and the statistical techniques used in the data analysis.

### **3.1. Methodology**

An empirical study based on a questionnaire administered online to the members of an association has been carried out to test the hypotheses. The sample is composed of members of a professional association in the province of Seville, in southern Spain. This association is a voluntary membership association. After checking for missing values in the data, a total of 156 valid questionnaires were obtained. A response rate of 85% was achieved. The sample is composed of 118 (75.6%) men, 33 (21.4%) women and 5 (3.2%) members who chose not to answer. The sample includes members over 24 years of age, with all age groups represented, especially those between 50 and 59 years old (44.9%) and those between 40 and 49 years old (22.3%). In terms of length of membership, 98 respondents (62.8%) had been members for more than 10 years and 58 respondents (37.2%) had been members for less than 10 years. The collection of information through the online questionnaire was carried out during the month of February 2021.

### **3.2. Measurement instruments**

With respect to the measurement instruments used, the membership commitment, the perceived value, the attitudinal loyalty and the participation behavior were measured with 5-point Likert scales made up of indicators extracted from the theoretical review carried out. The membership commitment, is a second-order construct, was measured by using an adapted scale of Allen and Meyer (1990) consisting of three dimensions: normative commitment, continuance commitment and affective commitment. Participation behavior is also a second-order construct made up of four dimensions, and has been measured adapting the scale from Yi and Gong (2013): information seeking, information exchange, responsible behavior and personal interaction. Perceived value has been measured with

four indicators. Finally, attitudinal loyalty has been measured with four indicators. All the constructs have been modeled in Mode A and therefore all scales are reflective.

### **3.3. Data analysis techniques**

The technique used to test the proposed model is Partial Least Squares (PLS), a variance-based approach to modeling structural equations, specifically SmartPLS software version 3.2.7 (Ringle et al, 2015). When applying PLS, first investigate the measurement model separately and then proceed to the evaluation of the structural model (Hair et al, 2017).

### **3.4. Measurement model**

To evaluate the measurement model, it is necessary to distinguish between the estimated mode A and mode B compounds. For compounds that have been estimated with mode A, the traditional measures of internal consistency, reliability and validity must be applied (Henseler et al., 2016). As a general rule to consider the reliability satisfactory, the loads of both indicators and dimensions must exceed the value of 0.7. In our case, all the indicators of the constructions estimated in mode A exceed this critical value (Table 1). In addition, as they show a composite reliability greater than 0.7 (Table 1) they meet that requirement.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

To prove the convergent validity of Mode A constructs, the average variance extracted (AVE) is applied. In our model, all constructs and dimensions meet this criterion as their AVE exceeds level 0.5 (Table 1).

To accept the discriminant validity, which indicates that each construct differs from the other constructs, a two-way approach is used: the square correlation of the construct must



not exceed the value of the AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); and the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) (Henseler et al., 2015). All values in the matrix are below 0.85 (Kline, 2010), and the confidence intervals for HTMT do not contain the value 1 (Henseler et al., 2015), so we accept discriminant validity (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

### **3.5. Structural model**

A bootstrapping (5000 samples) has been carried out to provide both t-values and confidence intervals that allow the evaluation of the statistical significance of the relationships (Roldán & Sánchez, 2012). Empirical evidence (table 3) reveals that there is a significant relationship between the participation behavior and the perceived value and also between the participation behavior and membership commitment, so that hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted. It is also ascertained that perceived value is positively related to the membership commitment, which leads us to accept hypothesis H4, and that membership commitment is positively related to attitudinal loyalty, which confirms hypothesis H5. In addition, attitudinal loyalty is positively related to intention to use, which confirms hypothesis H5. However, the hypothesis H3 is not admitted since there is no significant relationship between perceived value and intention to use. This may lead us to consider that the relationship between the perceived value and the intention to use is sequentially and positively mediated by membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The blindfold process allows us to evaluate the predictive importance of the constructions. When performing blindfold procedures, all the  $Q^2$  values are above zero, which supports the predictive relevance for endogenous constructs (Table 4).

#### INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

In addition, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is examined to evaluate the predictive power (sample prediction) for endogenous constructs. This indicates the amount of variance of a construct that is explained by predictor variables of that endogenous construct in the model (Chin, 2010). Therefore, in the presented model, the participation behavior explains 5.7% of the perceived value, which together with the participation behavior explains 53.1% of membership commitment. The membership commitment explains 59% of attitudinal loyalty, which in turn, together with reputation, explains 48.9% of the intention to use (Table 4).

To estimate the predictive importance of the Mode A constructs, the blindfolding procedure was applied. The predictive relevance for all the endogenous constructs was guaranteed because all the values of Q-square are over zero (membership commitment =0.359), (perceived value =0.074), (attitudinal loyalty =0.491), and (intention to use =0.288).

When examining the size of the effects ( $f^2$ ), following Cohen's heuristic rules (1988), we observe that the effect of the participation behavior on the perceived value (1.437) is large, the effect of participation behavior on the membership commitment is small (0.051) and the effect of perceived value on the membership commitment can be considered as large (0.901). In the same way, the effect of the membership commitment on attitudinal loyalty can also be considered as large (1.437), and the effect of attitudinal loyalty on the intention to use can also be considered as medium (0.446), however the effect of the perceived value on intention to use exists (0.006), although it does not exceed the minimum value.

It is also verified that the SRMR adjustment index is 0.078, lower than the recommended maximum value of 0.08, thus confirming the good fit of the global model.

### **3.6. Sequentially mediations**

This may lead us to consider that the relationship between the perceived value and the intention to use is sequentially and positively mediated by membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty.

To test sequentially mediations the procedure proposed by Carrión *et al.* (2017) was employed.

The first step is to establish the significance of each indirect effect. If the indirect effect is significant, the type of mediating effect and its magnitudes should be estimated in a second step.

To determine the significance of the three indirect effects in the relationship between perceived value and intention to use we calculated the percentile and the bias-corrected confidence intervals using the bootstrapping outputs (Nitzl *et al.*, 2016) (see Table 5).

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

If the confidence interval for the mediating effect does not include the zero value, it means that the mediating effect is significant (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). The results reveal that direct effect *c* is not significant, consequently, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Therefore, there is a positive and significant relationship between perceived value and membership commitment (a1). Also, there is a positive and significant relationship between membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty (a2). In addition, there is a positive and significant relationship between attitudinal loyalty and intention to use (b1).

The result shows that the indirect effect of  $a_1 \times a_2 \times b_1$  is significant. Consequently, hypothesis 7 is supported, confirming the sequentially mediating effect of membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty in the relation between perceived value and intention to use.

The Variance Accounted For index (VAF) approach is used to estimate the size of the indirect effect. Value of VAF between 0.20 and 0.80 indicates the existence of partial mediation; a value of less than 0.20 indicates lack of mediation, and a value greater than 0.80 implies that a full mediation can be assumed (Hair et al, 2017). Using the VAF index we can also assume the total mediation exercised by membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty over perceived value and intention to use. as the value of VAF is 0.972.

#### **4. Discussions**

Based on our findings, we believe that interesting theoretical and practical implications can emerge from this paper, and we will now comment on them.

##### **4.1 Theoretical implications**

Theoretical relevance of this study derives from its contribution to the literature that provides new knowledge on the relationships between variables of a different nature and their relationship with the intention to use the services offered by professional associations. The study offers the integration of psychological and behavioral variables linked to intention to use in a single integrative research framework in the field of professional associations,

Participation behavior refers to a behavior that involves customers' extent of providing information and making recommendations in order to become a part of decision making (Chan et al., 2010). Instead of participation behavior, our study deals with the construct

that refers to the participatory behavior of members, which makes it even more innovative and interesting.

The effect of the participation behavior has a double nature by affecting both perceived value and membership commitment. The participation behavior explains the 6,30% of the perceived value variance. Therefore, it can be affirmed that efforts to improve the participation behavior usually result in an improvement of perceived value.

We verify that the positive influence of the participation behavior on the membership commitment explains the 5,26 of its explained variance. This implies that the efforts to stimulate more member participation behavior becomes an extremely important element in building a strong membership commitment.

It is noteworthy that the perceived value has no significant direct effect on intention to use, which leads us to state that attempts to develop the perceived value without strengthening other important aspects for members will not achieve a positive effect on the intention to use.

In our opinion, the fact that H3 is not confirmed, i.e., that there is no direct positive relationship between perceived value and intention to use, is due to the peculiarities of professional associations as organizations. Perceived value points to differences between perceived benefits and perceived costs. In professional associations it is not sufficient that the perceived value is high, it is also necessary that the member feels committed to his association. It is also necessary that the member manifests an attitudinal loyalty that reflects satisfaction and a special bond with the association that leads him/her to recommend and promote it.

On the other hand, perceived value significantly and positively favors the membership commitment and explains the 47,84% of its variance explained.

In addition, the effects of membership commitment on attitudinal loyalty are positive and explain over half of its variance explained (58,13%). Strategies directed at achieving strong membership commitment will benefit members' attitudinal loyalty.

Attitudinal loyalty has a strong and positive influence on intention to use explaining a large percentage of its variance explained (45,09%). When a member has a high attitudinal loyalty to a professional association, he or she wants that organization to succeed and recommends it.

This leads us to suggest that membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty may play an important role in the relationship between perceived value and intention to use.

The results reveal that the relationship between perceived value and intention to use is sequentially mediated by membership commitment and attitudinal loyalty. This mediation is sufficiently robust to be considered total. Therefore, we can affirm that in order to improve the intention to use of an association's members, policies must be implemented that improve, firstly, membership commitment and, subsequently and simultaneously, attitudinal loyalty.

#### **4.2. Practical implications**

A further exploration of the reasons for the different relationships that have been tested with our model can help to improve the management of professional associations. Moreover, the specificities of professional associations mean that relationships traditionally admitted in other types of organizations could not be observed in the field of professional associations. In addition, due to the fact that professional associations have an important role to play in assisting their members in their professional practice, the special circumstances generated by the COVID-19 pandemic make the results of our research even more significant.

Professional association managers devote much effort to improving the perceived value to members by attempting to increase perceived benefits or, conversely, reduce perceived costs. Given the sequential mediating effect of commitment and attitudinal loyalty between perceived value and intention to use, strategies aimed at improving commitment and attitudinal loyalty should be developed to achieve greater use of the services offered and prompt professional development.

Additionally, our findings offer important insights for managers of professional associations where there is a tendency to involve members in participatory behavior. As the results of this research suggest, enhancing members' participatory behavior has many beneficial effects. On the one hand, the services offered and received are more in line with the needs of both members and the profession when members are highly involved with their association. Therefore, there is a positive and beneficial effect on both the perceived value and the commitment of members.

The positive effect of participatory behavior on perceived value occurs in the short term, but higher perceived value does not directly lead to higher intention to use of the association's members. Managers who focus all their efforts on improving the perceived value of members, and ignore the importance of loyalty and commitment, will not achieve the desired results.

Managers should be aware of the importance of developing membership commitment. The stronger the commitment of the members, the stronger the psychological attachment to the association. Therefore, members will be willing to make a higher effort on behalf of the association and other members.

Furthermore, our results indicate that when membership commitment improves, attitudinal loyalty also increases. Attitudinal loyalty is the best indicator of true loyalty and involves both members' satisfaction with the association and a strong psychological

attachment to the association. On the other hand, higher attitudinal loyalty also implies higher capital value of the members as they will remain in the association longer and generate more revenues for the association.

Consequently, managers must invest resources and effort in building attitudinal loyalty among their members. To this end, the association must attend to the individual needs of its members in order to perceive a high level of satisfaction when they use its services. Furthermore, the emotional bond with the association is strengthened at each contact. The association must be aware of its members' expectations and create a value proposition capable of providing an adequate response to their demands.

Our study also reveals that attitudinal loyalty positively and strongly affects intention to use. When members express high attitudinal loyalty, they will make higher use of the services offered by the professional association. Therefore, the professional association will perform better and have more income to further develop its services to members and enhance the profession.

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper deals with the analysis of some of the variables that affect the perception of the professional associations, as well as the knowledge of the relationships between them. The aim has been to determine the influence of membership commitment, participation behavior, perceived value, attitudinal loyalty on intention to use in the field of professional associations.

In line with the theoretical framework, this study considers participatory behavior as an antecedent of perceived value and organizational commitment. Moreover, the results show an interesting sequential mediation effect of organizational commitment and attitudinal loyalty on the relationship between perceived value and intention to use.



Our findings indicate that managers of professional associations need to develop strategies that favor modern management tools aimed at improving member participation, commitment and loyalty. This management philosophy will lead to a greater intention to use the services offered by the organization to its members and will likely lead to the advancement of the profession.

This study is not free of limitations. First, there is a wide variety of professional associations. This research study could be extended to different types of professional associations in order to detect possible differences according to their peculiarities. Future research could address the possibility of measuring whether the type of professional association influences the relationships between the association and its members.

Second, the sample used in the study is composed of professionals that most of them belong to the same culture. It could be interesting for future research to conduct a cross-cultural study.

In addition, the research design is cross-sectional. Future studies should employ a longitudinal approach to investigate the dynamic effect of member's participation behavior on organizational commitment and its influence on the mediating effect.

Finally, future research could assess whether the association's current services and strategies are adequate to the needs of its members after COVID-19.

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Table 1. Measurement model: Loadings, construct reliability and convergent validity

<b>First order model</b>				
	Construct/Dimension/Indicator	Loading	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Information seeking			0.854	0.661
	PB1. Before I became a member, I asked colleagues and friends for information to find out more about the Association.	0.841		
	PB2. Before becoming a member, I sought formal information about the Association.	0.818		
	PB3. Before becoming a member, I searched for comments on social networks and other websites to find out opinions about the Association.	0.779		
	PB4. The first time I attended a College of the Association, I looked at what other people were doing to see how I should behave.			
Information sharing				
	PB5. When I contact the Association, I usually make it very clear what I need.	0.808		
	PB6. I usually give the right information to the people who attend me at the Association.	0.885		
	PB7. I have provided all my personal details to the Association.	0.663		
	PB8. In my dealings with the Association, I always try to answer all the questions I am asked in relation to the service I am given.	0.887		
Responsible behavior			0.828	0.616
	PB9. I follow all the instructions received by the Association in relation to the service provided to me.	0.809		
	PB10. I will behave as a member of the Order is expected to behave.	0.791		
	PB11. I am committed to fulfilling my responsibilities as a member of the Association.	0.754		
Personal interaction			0.876	0.705
	PB12. I am usually polite to the people who serve me at the Association.	0.895		
	PB13. I am usually polite to the people who assist me at the Association.	0.906		
	PB14. I have never acted rudely towards the people who attend to me at the Association.	0.702		
Perceived value			0.945	0.812
	PV1. The Association provides greater value than other professional associations.	0.884		

	PV2. The intangible attributes of the Association are sufficient reason to join the association.	0.890		
	PV3. It is worth paying the membership fee for the benefits they offer.	0.916		
	PV4. The Association provides extra added value to its members.	0.916		
Intention to use				
	IU1. I will vote in the next elections for the Board of Directors of the association.	0.892		
	IU2. I will attend the next ordinary assembly of the Association.	0.909		
	IU3. I will attend the next Extraordinary Association Assembly.			
	IU4. I will attend one of the informative talks organized by the Association.	0.892		
	IU5. I will register in one of the training courses organized by the Association.	0.906		
	IU6. I will subscribe to the Association newsletter.			
	IU7. I will follow the Association on social media.			
	IU8. I will do something that involves traveling to the Association's headquarters.	0.713		
	IU9. I will participate in a social event promoted by the Association.	0.800		
Affective commitment			0.960	0.857
	AC1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Association.	0.929		
	AC2. I feel that the problems of the Association are mine.	0.919		
	AC3. The Association has great personal significance for me.	0.949		
	AC4. I feel like "part of the family" at the Association.	0.906		
	AC5. I have little, if any, emotional attachment to the Association. (R)			
	AC6. Interaction with other members enriches me personally and professionally.			
Commitment to continuity			0.885	0.607
	CC1. At the moment, remaining at the Association is a matter of necessity.	0.705		
	CC2. At this time, remaining at the Association is a matter of desire.			
	CC3. Ceasing to be a member is not an option because I am guaranteed the use of the Association brand.	0.759		
	CC4. Ceasing to be a member is not an option because they provide me with a series of services that are indispensable to me.	0.864		

	CC5. If I decided to stop being a member of the Association now, my professional career would suffer.	0.854		
	CC6. I am not thinking of giving up my membership because there are no alternatives available to me.			
	CC7. One of the main reasons why I continue to belong to the Association is that ceasing to belong would require considerable personal or professional sacrifice.	0.696		
Normative commitment			0.879	0.785
	NC1. The performance of Association' own activities by non-members should not be permitted.	0.809		
	NC2. The carrying out of Association' activities by non-members should be considered professional intrusion.	0.754		
	NC3. The support provided by the association justifies my membership over the years.	0.908		
	NC4. If only to preserve and improve the profession, I feel that I have an obligation to remain a member of the Association.	0.864		
Attitudinal loyalty			0.946	0.854
	AL1. I will encourage others to participate in the activities of the Association.	0.894		
	AL2. I will talk about the positive aspects of the Association to other people.	0.950		
	AL3. I will recommend the Association to anyone who seeks my advice.	0.929		
	AL4. I will continue to be a member next year.			
	<b>Second Order model</b>			
Participation behavior			0.872	0.696
Information seeking				
Information sharing		0.868		
Responsible behavior		0.892		
Personal interaction		0.733		
Membership commitment			0.870	0.691
Affective commitment		0.857		
Commitment to continuity		0.781		
Normative commitment		0.855		

Table 2. Measurement Model. Discriminant Validity Discriminante

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion						Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio HTMT				
	MCOM	PB	IU	AL	PV		MCOM	PB	IU	AL	PV
MCOM	0.831					MCOM					
PB	0.329	0.834				CPB	0.409				
IU	0.621	0.232	0.770			ITU	0.746	0.293			
AL	0.768	0.312	0.697	0.924		AL	0.894	0.360	0.788		
PV	0.712	0.251	0.511	0.677	0.901	PV	0.833	0.292	0.582	0.737	

Note: MCOM= Membership commitment; PB= Participation behavior; AL= Attitudinal loyalty; IU= Intention to use; PV= Perceived value



Table 3: Summary of structural model results.

	Path	P Values	T statistics	Confidence Interval	f2	Supported
PB -> PV	0.251	0.000	4.067	[0.124; 0.365]	1.437	Yes
PB -> MCOM	0.160	0.002	3.095	[0.046; 0.252]	0.051	Yes
PV -> MCOM	0.672	0.000	15.664	[0.577; 0.746]	0.901	Yes
PV -> IU	0.091	0.229	1.204	[-0.062; 0.236]	0.005	No
MCOM-> AL	0.757	0.000	26.283	[0.692; 0.808]	1.437	Yes
AL -> IU	0.647	0.000	10.447	[0.509; 0.756]	0.446	Yes

Note: MCOM= Membership commitment; PB= Participation behavior; AL= Attitudinal loyalty; IU= Intention to use; PV= Perceived value; Bootstrapping based on n = 5000 subsamples. Hypothesized effects are assessed by applying a one-tailed test for a t Student distribution (CI 95%).

Table 4: Effects on endogenous variables

	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	Direct Effect	Correlations	Variance explained
Perceived value	0.057	0.049			
H1: Participation behavior			0.251	0.251	6.30%
Membership commitment	0.531	0.358			
H2: Participation behavior			0.160	0.329	5.26%
H4 (a1): Perceived value			0.672	0.712	47.84%
Attitudinal loyalty	0.590	0.485			
H5 (a2): Membership commitment			0.757	0.768	58.13%
Intention to use	0.489	0.282			
H3: Perceived value			0.091	0.511	4.65%
H6 (b1): Attitudinal loyalty			0.647	0.697	45.09%
			Indirect Effect		
H7: PV -> IU (Via MCOM and AL)			0.329		

Note: MCOM= Membership commitment; PB= Participation behavior; AL= Attitudinal loyalty; IU= Intention to use; PV= Perceived value

Table 5: Summary of mediating effects

DIRECT EFFECTS	Coefficient	PERCENTILE		Percentile BC		
		LOWER (5%)	LOWER (95%)	LOWER (5%)	LOWER (95%)	
C	0.008	-0.132	0.147	-0.132	0.147	nsig
a1	0.672	0.594	0.740	0.595	0.741	sig
a2	0.761	0.714	0.806	0.715	0.808	sig
b1	0.531	0.395	0.669	0.400	0.674	sig
INDIRECT EFFECT						
(a1xa2xb1)	0.272	0.196	0.360	0.200	0.364	sig

Notes: sig: Significant. nsig: Not significant. BC: Bias corrected