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REVIEW ARTICLE

MARKETING CAPABILITIES AND PERFORMANCE IN FASHION RETAIL: *RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRAND VISIBILITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY*

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: fashion retail demands constant differentiation, and marketing capabilities offer a lens to understand how stores organize resources around product, price, channel and communication. **Objective:** to analyze the relationship between marketing capabilities and performance in fashion retail, considering brand visibility and customer loyalty. **Methods:** qualitative, exploratory bibliographic research, with a critical review of a corpus of three journal articles and thematic analysis in five categories, supported by theoretical literature. **Results:** a single empirical study shows that product, channel and communication capabilities are positively associated with perceived performance, channel standing out; price capability showed no significant relationship. Links to visibility and loyalty are conceptual or indirect. **Conclusion:** the chain from capabilities to visibility, loyalty and performance is a hypothesis to be tested, and the article proposes a research agenda.

1 INTRODUCTION

Fashion retail is marked by frequent changes in trends, intense competition and the need to keep pace with consumer behavior. Chagas (2015) points out that, in this sector, marketing plays a strategic role in building and strengthening brands, because companies need to differentiate themselves, communicate value and follow technological and behavioral transformations. Santos and Luz (2013) add that customer relationship management gains importance in a market in which it is necessary to understand desires, expectations and changes in the consumer profile.

In this context, the concept of marketing capabilities helps to see marketing beyond isolated actions. Matte et al. (2020) present marketing capabilities as organizational processes aimed at combining and transforming resources to respond to the market and, in the case of specialized capabilities, organize them into

four dimensions: product, price, channel and communication. Thus, a marketing capability is not limited to running a promotion, posting on a social network or changing a price; it concerns the competence with which the company organizes resources, knowledge and routines in a consistent manner.

The distinction among capability, strategy, action and tool is important for this study. Strategies are directions adopted by the organization to achieve objectives; actions and tools are the means of executing those directions; and capabilities are the organizational ability to mobilize resources and knowledge to carry out these actions continuously and in a manner suited to market conditions. This reading is consistent with the tradition that defines capabilities as sets of accumulated skills and knowledge that allow the firm to add value to its products and services (Day, 1994) and with the approach to specialized capabilities as functional processes linked to the marketing mix (Morgan, 2012).

Two other constructs complete the problem. Brand visibility appears in the fashion literature mainly through discussions of image, publicity, communication and differentiation, and customer loyalty, through customer relationship management. The four core elements of this work, namely marketing capabilities, brand visibility, customer loyalty and performance, are addressed by different studies, which generally do not analyze them in the same model. It is this gap that justifies an integrative analysis, without presupposing causality among the constructs.

The research problem guiding the article is: how are marketing capabilities related to performance in fashion retail, considering their relationships with brand visibility and customer loyalty? The general objective is to analyze this relationship. The specific objectives are: (a) to identify the marketing capabilities addressed by the literature in the context of fashion retail; (b) to analyze the relationship between marketing capabilities and brand visibility; (c) to analyze the relationship between brand visibility and customer loyalty; (d) to discuss the relationship between customer loyalty and performance; and (e) to analyze, in light of the literature, how these constructs are articulated with performance.

The contribution is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the article separates what studies actually demonstrate from what they merely suggest, which is decisive in a field where direct empirical evidence is scarce and the temptation to chain constructs into a causal sequence is strong. Managerially, it offers fashion retailers criteria for assessing which capabilities to invest in and what expectations are reasonable regarding visibility and loyalty.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

2.1 Research design

This is bibliographic research with a qualitative approach and an exploratory character. According to Gil (2002), bibliographic research is developed from material that has already been published and makes it possible to examine existing contributions on a given problem. In the typology of Grant and Booth (2009), the study approximates a critical review of a delimited corpus: it critically assesses a small set of studies and interprets them in light of a conceptual framework, without the claim to exhaustiveness of systematic reviews. To organize the analysis, thematic analysis guided by the objectives was adopted, based on Braun and Clarke (2006), with five previously defined categories: clothing retail, marketing capabilities, brand visibility or image, customer loyalty or relationship, and performance.

2.2 Analytical corpus

The analytical corpus consists of three articles published in scientific journals: Matte et al. (2020), in the Revista Brasileira de Marketing (ReMark); Santos and Luz (2013), in the journal Conhecimento Interativo; and Chagas (2015), in ModaPalavra e-Periódico. The selection took place in September 2026, between the 15th and the 22nd, through searches on Google Scholar, and was purposive, since it started from the three articles previously gathered by the group. For this reason, no systematic search was conducted in multiple databases, and no Boolean operators were applied to form an initial universe of records. The descriptors that guided the relevance of the texts were marketing, fashion retail, clothing, marketing capabilities, performance, brand, differentiation, relationship and loyalty, and the publication period of the corpus runs from 2013 to 2020.

The inclusion criteria were: being a scientific article published in a journal; having the full text available; showing a direct relationship with fashion, clothing or fashion retail; and contributing to at least one of the core categories. Undergraduate theses, blogs, non-academic websites and materials with no direct relationship to the problem were excluded. Three records were assessed, there were no duplicates, and all three met the criteria.

2.3 Theoretical support layer and analysis

Because the analytical corpus is small, the interpretation drew on a second layer of literature, composed of classic works and reference studies on marketing capabilities, brand, loyalty and performance. This layer has an exclusively conceptual function: it underpins definitions and makes it possible to situate the findings of the corpus, but it was not subjected to systematic extraction and is not part of the count of the analytical corpus. The bibliographic data of the cited works were checked in metadata databases in October 2026.

The analysis proceeded in three stages: reading the articles while recording objective, method, context and main results; identifying and comparing the content related to each category; and observing convergences, differences and limits. Matte et al. (2020) was treated as a quantitative empirical study, and Santos and Luz (2013) and Chagas (2015) as predominantly theoretical works, and this difference in nature was preserved in the interpretation. No data were collected from companies or consumers, and the review does not demonstrate a causal sequence among visibility, loyalty and performance: when influence on performance is mentioned, it refers to the empirical findings of Matte et al. (2020), within the context and the model investigated. To support the organization of information, the textual revision and the structuring of the article, the authors used ChatGPT, and the selection of references, the analysis and the interpretations remain their responsibility.

3 MARKETING CAPABILITIES IN FASHION RETAIL

3.1 From the concept to specialized capabilities

The notion of capability is associated, in the marketing literature, with complex sets of skills and knowledge that organizations apply through their processes (Day, 1994). Vorhies and Morgan (2005) propose assessing marketing capabilities by comparison with the best in the industry, which reinforces the idea that what matters is the degree of proficiency with which the company executes its processes, and not merely the existence of activities. Morgan (2012) reviews the relationship between marketing and business performance, and Morgan et al. (2009) examine how market orientation and marketing capabilities relate to firm performance. Together, these works provide the conceptual basis on which Matte et al. (2020) formulate their hypotheses.

Matte et al. (2020) define marketing capabilities as organizational processes aimed at meeting marketing needs and at combining resources to create value and respond to market conditions. For clothing retail, they analyze four specialized capabilities, whose core is the marketing mix: product, price, channel and communication management. Table 1 summarizes what each one involves and how, according to the literature examined, it manifests itself in fashion retail.

Table 1 — Specialized marketing capabilities, manifestation in fashion retail and empirical result

Capability	What it involves	Manifestation in fashion retail	Result in Matte et al. (2020)
Product	Understanding market opportunities and preferences, adjusting the mix and introducing novelties.	Following trends and translating the desire to be in vogue into collections; “selling fashion,” and not just clothes (Chagas, 2015).	Positive relationship with performance (β = 0.216; p = 0.007).
Price	Routines and knowledge for managing prices in relation to consumers and competitors.	Pricing policy in the face of broad supply and intense competition; less discussed in the theoretical texts of the corpus.	Hypothesis not confirmed (β = 0.079; p = 0.371).
Channel	Competences to support customers and develop close relationships with them.	Proximity, service and relationship; in-store and digital shopping experience (Chagas, 2015; Santos & Luz, 2013).	Positive relationship with performance (β = 0.268; p < 0.001).
Communication	Using marketing communication to manage perceptions, publicize products and work on image.	Continuous and interactive presence in digital media, with two-way communication (Chagas, 2015).	Positive relationship (β = 0.135; p = 0.031), moderated by the firm’s time in operation.

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), based on Matte et al. (2020) for the columns “What it involves” and “Result,” and on Chagas (2015) and Santos and Luz (2013) for the column “Manifestation,” which is the authors’ interpretive reading.

3.2 What the empirical evidence shows

Matte et al. (2020) conducted a survey of 200 clothing stores in Caxias do Sul, collected in June and July 2017 and analyzed through structural equation modeling. The product, channel and communication capabilities showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with performance, and the hypothesis for price was not confirmed. The authors attribute the price result to the size of the stores, since 87% have up to nine employees, which would limit the pricing systems that the capability presupposes. According to the study, the channel capability stood out among the capabilities, and entrepreneurial orientation, also included in the model, was the variable with the greatest weight.

The authors associate the prominence of the channel capability with the possibility of the company getting closer to the customer, obtaining information about their needs and using this knowledge to adjust products and communication. This interpretation is conceptually relevant, because it links the channel capability to customer relationships, a theme that reappears in section 5.

4 BRAND VISIBILITY AND MARKET PRESENCE

4.1 Visibility as an analytical category

Brand visibility is not measured, in the three articles, as an independent and standardized construct. For this reason, in this work it is used as an analytical category close to the ideas of exposure, recognition, image and brand presence before the consumer. The distinction proposed by Keller (1993) helps to delimit it: brand knowledge is composed of awareness, that is, the ability to recognize and recall the brand, and of image, that is, the associations the consumer holds. Visibility corresponds mainly to awareness; image requires favorable, strong and unique associations that exposure alone does not guarantee.

4.2 What the fashion literature says

Chagas (2015) states that fashion marketing focuses on current and potential customers and seeks to leverage sales and strengthen brand image. The author distinguishes selling clothes, a logic of supply, demand and cost-benefit, from selling fashion, which involves the desire to be in vogue and to follow trends, and understands branding as the construction of identity, ideas and experiences, and not only the sale of products. She also observes that contemporary communication has become two-way: consumers not only receive messages but respond, provide feedback and interact with brands, which requires a continuous and interactive presence in digital media.

From this transformation the author draws an important conclusion for this study: a brand's market presence depends not only on being publicized, but on creating contact and experience with the public. It should be noted that this is a theoretical and descriptive discussion, without original data collection, and that the secondary data she cites on e-commerce and social networks date from 2013, which calls for caution regarding their currency.

4.3 Communication capability and image

Matte et al. (2020) complement this perspective by addressing the communication capability, associated with the management of customers' perceptions, the publicizing of the brand and products and the construction of a differentiated image. The empirical results showed a positive relationship between the communication capability and performance. The effect, however, was moderated by time in operation: in firms with six or more years of activity, the estimate was 0.152 ($p = 0.041$); in those with one to five years, −0.049 ($p = 0.450$). This result suggests that communication pays off more where there is accumulated reputation, which is consistent with the idea that visibility and image are built over time, but the study measures neither visibility nor image, and the reading is an interpretation.

There is thus a difference in status between the two texts. In Chagas (2015), visibility is a direct object, but of a conceptual nature; in Matte et al. (2020), communication is measured and related to performance, but visibility is only an implicit by-product. The relationship between marketing capabilities and brand visibility, the object of the second specific objective, is therefore supported only indirectly.

5 CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN FASHION RETAIL

5.1 Loyalty: attitude, behavior and profitability

The literature distinguishes satisfaction from loyalty: loyal customers are usually satisfied, but satisfaction alone does not always produce lasting commitment (Oliver, 1999). Dick and Basu (1994) propose that loyalty results from the combination of relative attitude and repurchase behavior, and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) show that trust and affect lead to purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, with distinct effects on market share and relative price. Kumar and Shah (2004) discuss profitable loyalty, noting that loyalty should also be evaluated by its return to the company. From a relational standpoint, Morgan and Hunt (1994) place trust and commitment at the center of the lasting relationship between the parties.

5.2 Loyalty in the corpus

In the corpus, loyalty is treated in a manner close to customer relationship management. Santos and Luz (2013), in a theoretical review, discuss marketing 3.0 applied to fashion companies and argue that it constitutes a differentiator in a highly competitive sector, in which companies should prioritize the human factor. They argue that companies should rethink marketing methods, strategies and techniques not only to win new consumers but also to retain them. According to the journal abstract, the study takes the human factor as the priority criterion, and its keywords include customer relationship management, which supports treating loyalty here as close to relationship management. Because the full text could not be consulted, this section does not go beyond what the abstract states (see Section 7.4).

Chagas (2015) presents loyalty as the ultimate goal of fashion marketing and mentions the Pareto principle and customer relationship management as instruments for maintaining lasting relationships. For the author, consumers seek a relationship and an experience with brands, which reinforces the importance of communication capable of bringing the company and the public closer. Matte et al. (2020), in turn, do not measure loyalty, but associate the channel capability with proximity and relationship with the customer, which makes it the capability most directly linked to the theme.

5.3 From visibility to loyalty

The third specific objective asks whether brand visibility is related to loyalty. In the supporting literature, the answer is conditional. For Keller (1993), awareness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a favorable image, and the latter, in turn, contributes to more positive consumer responses. Seiders et al. (2005) show, in longitudinal retail data, that the relationship between satisfaction and repurchase is moderated by convenience, competition, involvement and income, and that intention and observed behavior may differ. The passage from exposure to retention therefore depends on the experience actually lived and on contextual factors.

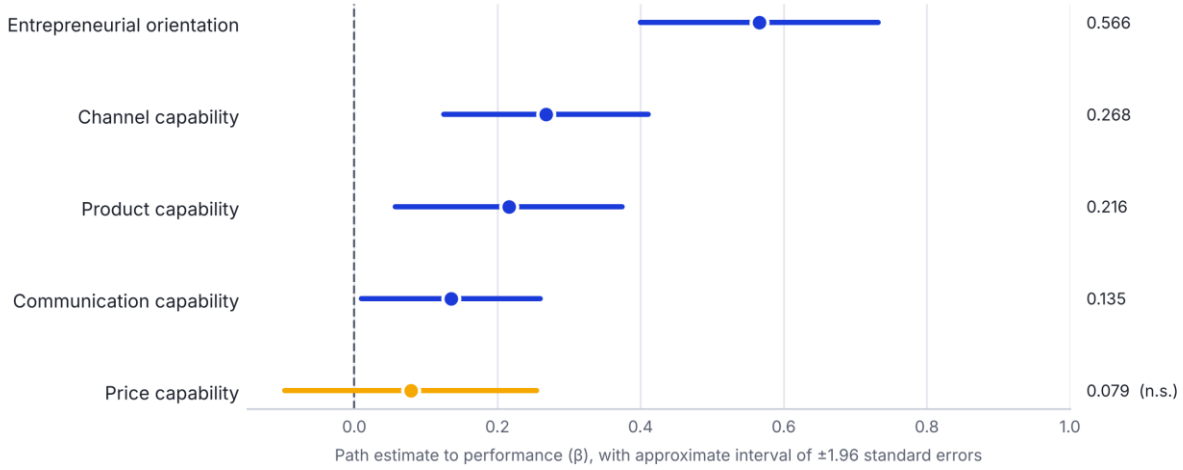
In the corpus, no study simultaneously measures visibility and loyalty. The connection between the two is inferred from conceptual arguments, such as the one that two-way communication and a consistent experience bring the company and the public closer (Chagas, 2015), and not from data.

6 PERFORMANCE AND ARTICULATION AMONG THE CONSTRUCTS

6.1 Performance in Matte et al. (2020)

Performance was measured on a seven-point scale, with items on return on investment, return on sales and profitability compared with competitors, and not through financial records. Figure 1 shows the path estimates to performance, with approximate intervals calculated from the reported standard errors. Entrepreneurial orientation has the highest estimate (0.566), followed by the channel (0.268), product (0.216) and communication (0.135) capabilities; the price capability (0.079) has an interval that includes zero.

Figure 1 — Path estimates to performance in clothing stores in Caxias do Sul



Source: prepared by the authors (2026) based on the estimates and standard errors of Matte et al. (2020). The ±1.96 standard-error intervals are approximations calculated by the authors of this article and were not reported in the original study. n.s.: not significant.

The study reports that entrepreneurial orientation and the specialized capabilities explain 48% of performance in the full model, and that entrepreneurial orientation alone explains 57%. It also reports individual percentages for each capability (channel, 27%; product, 22%; communication, 13%; price, 8%). These values do not add up to the percentage of the full model, so they should be read only as indications of the relative position of each capability, and not as additive shares of performance. The moderations by firm size and by manager's education were not confirmed, and the moderation by time in operation was confirmed only for communication.

Two cautions are necessary in reading the results. The first is that the authors themselves acknowledge limitations: the performance scale is perceptual and relative, some respondents may be unaware of the company's results, it was not verified whether the respondent was the entrepreneur, and the results come from one city and one sector. The second is that the model fit indices fell short of conventional thresholds (RMSEA of 0.095 and CFI of 0.818, for example), although the authors justify continuing the analysis by acceptable factor loadings and convergent and discriminant validity. These points do not invalidate the study, but indicate that its estimates should be treated as initial evidence, and not as parameters for the sector.

6.2 Capabilities, entrepreneurial orientation and performance

The prominence of entrepreneurial orientation is consistent with the meta-analysis by Rauch et al. (2009), which identifies a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance, and converges with the idea, suggested by the authors, that firms that seek novelty and create new products or services gain position relative to competitors. For the present article, this has a conceptual implication: marketing capabilities do not explain performance on their own, and management's attitude toward innovation and risk seems to weigh as much or more. The relationship between capabilities and performance should therefore be read as part of a set of organizational factors.

6.3 Loyalty and performance

As for the fourth specific objective, the corpus does not examine the relationship between loyalty and performance. In the supporting literature, there are indications that loyalty is associated with market outcomes: Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) relate trust and affect to loyalty and the latter to market share and relative price, in aggregate brand data, and Palmatier et al. (2006), in a meta-analysis, identify relationship quality as the construct with the greatest influence on objective performance. These are findings from other contexts and levels of analysis, and it is plausible that something similar occurs in fashion retail, but there is no way to affirm it on the basis of the corpus.

6.4 Coverage of the corpus and articulation

Table 2 shows how each study covers the analytical categories. Coverage is uneven: only the study by Matte et al. (2020) measures performance, and none of the three addresses capabilities, visibility, loyalty and performance simultaneously.

Table 2 — Coverage of the analytical categories by the studies in the corpus

Study	Nature	Capabilities	Visibility and image	Loyalty	Performance
Matte et al. (2020)	Empirical, quantitative (200 stores)	Measured	Indirect (communication)	Indirect (channel)	Measured
Santos and Luz (2013)	Theoretical (review)	Not addressed	Indirect	Conceptual (CRM)	Not addressed
Chagas (2015)	Theoretical and descriptive	Indirect (strategic role)	Conceptual	Conceptual	Not measured

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), from the reading of the studies. The classification of Santos and Luz (2013) is based on the journal abstract and on the group's manuscript. Measured: construct empirically measured; Conceptual: treated as an object of theoretical discussion; Indirect: addressed as a by-product of another theme.

A hierarchy of support results from this. The relationship between capabilities and performance has direct empirical support, but from a single study, in one city, with perceived performance. The relationship between capabilities and visibility is indirect, via communication. The relationship between visibility and loyalty is conceptual, and that between loyalty and performance was not examined in the corpus. There is therefore no basis to claim that marketing capabilities raise performance through visibility and loyalty: this is a hypothesis to be tested, not a result.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Convergences and divergences among the studies

Regarding the first specific objective, the literature in the corpus identifies four specialized capabilities (product, price, channel and communication), but only Matte et al. (2020) operationalize them. The theoretical texts address elements that can be read as manifestations of these capabilities, such as trends and design (product), relationship and experience (channel) and two-way digital communication (communication), but hardly discuss price. The absence of an effect of the price capability in the empirical study and the silence of the theoretical texts coincide, although it cannot be concluded from this that price is irrelevant: the authors' explanation, linked to store size, points rather to a contextual condition.

There is convergence among the texts regarding the centrality of relationships. Chagas (2015) states that customers seek relationship and experience; Santos and Luz (2013) treat relationship management as a priority of fashion marketing; and Matte et al. (2020) find, in the channel capability, associated with proximity to the customer, the one that stands out most among the capabilities. The convergence is one of direction and not of method, since it brings together one piece of empirical evidence and two theoretical arguments, but it is the most consistent link in the set.

The main divergence is one of nature and emphasis. Whereas Chagas (2015) emphasizes digital communication and differentiation, the empirical study shows that communication is the capability with the smallest effect among the significant ones and that its effect depends on the maturity of the firm. This does not contradict the author, whose discussion is conceptual, but it relativizes the expectation that investing in communication alone will produce performance gains, especially in young firms.

7.2 Answers to the specific objectives

For objectives (b) to (e), the synthesis is as follows. The relationship between capabilities and visibility is supported indirectly, through the communication capability. The relationship between visibility and loyalty is conceptual: visibility creates awareness, but loyalty depends on image, trust and experience (Keller, 1993; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Seiders et al., 2005). The relationship between loyalty and performance was not

examined in the corpus, although the supporting literature considers it plausible. And the articulation among the four constructs remains a hypothesis, because no study analyzes them jointly.

7.3 Implications for fashion retail

- **Treat capabilities as processes, not as actions.** Investing in routines and knowledge that sustain product, channel and communication on a continuous basis tends to be more consistent with the concept than carrying out isolated actions.
- **Prioritize proximity to the customer.** The channel capability stood out most in the empirical study, and the theoretical literature converges on the importance of relationship and experience.
- **Expect gradual returns from communication.** The effect of the communication capability was significant only in firms with six or more years of activity.
- **Do not confuse visibility with loyalty.** Being seen is a condition for awareness, but retention depends on image, trust and experience.
- **Assess price in light of size and structure.** The absence of an effect of the price capability in small stores suggests that the gain depends on a management structure that many of them do not yet have.

7.4 Limitations and research agenda

The review has three main limitations. The first is the small, purposively selected corpus, which prevents generalizations and does not allow one to claim that the literature on the subject is the one portrayed here. The second is the inequality in nature among the studies, with a single empirical work, from one city and based on perceived performance. The third is that the analysis of Santos and Luz (2013) relied on the journal abstract and on the group's manuscript. In addition, the older texts reflect a digital context that has changed since 2013.

Future research may advance in four directions: testing, in a single model, the relationships among capabilities, visibility, loyalty and performance, with explicit mediations; using objective performance measures, such as revenue and margin, to overcome perception bias; employing longitudinal designs, which make it possible to examine the temporal sequence among the constructs; and expanding the sample to other cities, firm sizes and fashion retail segments, including e-commerce and multi-brand stores.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to understand how marketing capabilities are related to performance in fashion retail, considering brand visibility and customer loyalty. The literature examined allows us to state that there is empirical evidence, albeit limited to one study, that the product, channel and communication capabilities are positively associated with perceived performance in clothing stores, with channel standing out, and that the price capability showed no significant relationship in this context. It also allows us to state that the theoretical literature recognizes the importance of brand image, two-way communication and relationships with customers.

What the literature does not allow us to claim is that marketing capabilities lead to performance through visibility and loyalty. These relationships are supported by conceptual arguments and by literature from other contexts, but have not been tested in fashion retail and should not be read as causal. The main contribution of the study is precisely to map clearly the degree of support for each relationship and to indicate where the gaps lie.

The limitations noted, in particular the small corpus and the scarcity of empirical studies, point the way: integrated models, objective performance measures and longitudinal designs. For the fashion retailer, the practical message is prudent: investing in consistent capabilities, especially those linked to proximity to the customer, is a well-supported bet, and expecting visibility and loyalty to convert automatically into performance is a hypothesis that still awaits confirmation.

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Use of artificial intelligence: the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to support the organization of information, textual revision and structuring of the manuscript. In this version, Claude (Anthropic) was used to read the studies in the corpus, to write and refine the text and to verify the bibliographic references. The authors reviewed the content and take full responsibility for it.

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