THE IMPACTS OF BRAND EXPERIENCES ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

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Abstract. The problem addressed in this study is that the impact of the customer experience on the achievement of positive customer outcomes is still unknown in Arabic restaurants. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the effect of brand experience, as measured through sensory, emotional, behavioural, and intellectual brand experience, on customer satisfaction and customer electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as well as the effect of customer satisfaction on eWOM. Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire consisting of 18 items distributed to a convenience sample of Facebook users. A total of 311 valid responses were collected. The participants were asked to evaluate their satisfaction and eWOM based on 6 items and their brand experience based on 12 items. Using IBM SPSS AMOS, the study revealed that three dimensions of brand experience (sensory, emotional, and behavioural) were significantly related to customer satisfaction and eWOM. Intellectual brand experience, according to the results of the current study, had no significant effect on customer satisfaction or eWOM. This conclusion is highlighted at the end of the paper along with its implications and recommendations. The contribution of this study stems from the fact that it alerts organizations to the factors influencing customer behaviour that ultimately lead to positive outcomes.

Keywords: sensory brand experience, emotional brand experience, behavioural brand experience, intellectual brand experience, brand experience, customer satisfaction, eWOM.

JEL Classification: M, M30, M31, M37, M39, C83.

Introduction

Organizations should reconsider their strategies, especially their marketing strategies, for a number of reasons. One reason is the growing number of brands and increasing competition among enterprises. In this regard, the researcher has monitored some complaints from restaurants, which have experienced a lack of frequent customers, and noted the failure of some restaurants and their inability to continue to operate. Hence, advice is needed that can be given to restaurants' managers to help them to recover and maintain their customer base.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty as key objectives for organizations have occupied a great deal of marketing literature. The factors that contribute to the achievement of these goals are extremely important, especially in the restaurant sector, and include direct interaction between the customers and the restaurant and the products and services that it offers. One of the most important topics mentioned by researchers is related to customer experience when interacting with a particular brand. Koetz

(2019) pointed out the need to improve customer experience and reward loyalty because they work to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Researchers have shown that consumer experience occurs in certain situations, most importantly when searching for products, buying products, or receiving certain services. They have also defined customer experience as the impressions that are formed when interacting with those products or services (Brakus et al., 2009). Another study (Berry et al., 2002) added that clues sent by an organization to its customers affect them in different ways. The researchers also categorized the consumer or brand experience into several components to understand what this experience implies (Verhoef et al., 2009). The most common model used by researchers to identify customer brand experience is the model developed by Brakus et al. (2009), which consists of four types: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural brand experience.

The study of customer experience is important for companies as they recognize that the factors influencing the purchasing behaviour of customers depend not only

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on the characteristics of the quality of products or services but also on other factors related to the physical and moral aspects of the customers. A number of studies have shown that customer experience has an impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Barnes et al., 2014; Liu & Jang, 2009; Nysveen et al., 2013, Mohammed et al., 2017), customer engagement (Prentice et al., 2019), customer commitment (Iglesias et al., 2019), and electronic word of mouth (Jeong & Jang, 2011). The problem that the current study addresses is that the impact of the customer experience on achieving positive customer outcomes is still widely unknown in Arabic restaurants; even when the impact is known, few are aware of it. Therefore, the importance of the current study stems from the fact that it alerts organizations to the factors influencing customer behaviour that ultimately lead to positive outcomes.

1. Literature review and hypothesis development

1.1. Definition of customer experience

Customer experience and experience are used interchangeably in the current study. Customer experience has been defined from numerous perspectives. Verhoef et al. (2009) indicated that customer experience is a multidimensional construct built on a customer's physical, social, cognitive, and affective states, which originate from his or her responses to the firm. Berry et al. (2002) explained customer experience with reference to clues sent from a firm to its customers. Brakus et al. (2009) identified four cases in which consumer experience of goods and services occurs: searching for products, shopping for products, receiving services, and consuming products or services. Consequently, customer experience was defined for the purpose of the current study as the occurrence of an impression due to a product- or service-related event. That is, a customer who encounters a product or service forms a cognitive, emotional, social, or physical impression of the product or the service itself, the place where this product or service is delivered, and the personnel who are responsible for providing such a product or service.

1.2. Dimensions of customer experience

Understanding the dimensions of customer experience requires a prerequisite step in which one can perceive how scholars have operationalized this construct as well as which drivers of customer experience have been reported by authors. A considerable amount of marketing literature has been dedicated to the drivers of customer experience. For Berry et al. (2002), the clues that a firm sends to its customers are a key driver of customer experience. The authors divided these clues into two key categories: thing-related clues, which represent product or service functionality, and human-originated clues, which constitute workers' emotional responses. In fact, these insights are related to customer experience management, which is a pivotal skill that firms should develop. According to

Verhoef et al. (2009), customer experience is generated by controllable and uncontrollable elements. These elements were portrayed by the authors in their proposed model of customer experience creation, which reported drivers of customer experience, that is, the social environment, service interface, retail atmosphere, price, retail brand, customer past experience, assortment, and customer experience in alternative channels.

Regarding the conceptualization of customer experience, Brakus et al. (2009) divided customer experience into a number of key categories, which are product experience, shopping and service experience, and consuming experience. The authors identified two types of product experience: direct and indirect experience. Direct product experience occurs in the case of physical interaction between the customer and the product, while indirect product experience is embedded in virtual or advertised products. A firm's physical environment, employees, and practices are indicators of shopping and service experience. Finally, feeling pleasure during or after consumption of the product is the core of consuming experience.

Schmitt (1999, cited in Hosany & Witham, 2010) conceptualized this construct in terms of five types of experience: physical experience, sensory experience, cognitive experience, social identity experience, and affective experience. Hosany and Witham (2010) explored the dimensions of tourists' experience and found that it consists of four major dimensions: education, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics. In their scale developed to measure brand experience, Brakus et al. (2009) validated a model consisting of four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural brand experience. Similarly, Zhang (2019) explored the effect of brand experience on brand loyalty, measuring brand experience through sensory, emotional, thinking, action, and related brand experiences.

In the dining industry, dimensions of customer experience can be understood through restaurant attributes such as food quality, service quality, restaurant atmosphere, and price fairness (Liu & Jang, 2009). In a study on the relationship between customer dining experience in lunch and supper restaurants, Andersson and Mossberg (2004) found that lunch customers are more focused on psychological needs while supper customers are more socially oriented. To assess customer experience, they asked customers to evaluate their willingness to pay for particular aspects of their restaurant experience, such as dining service, food quality, food cuisine, restaurant interior design, and other customers. Other dimensions of customer experience identified by authors include restaurant environmental factors and customer interactions with restaurant employees and other customers (Wu & Liang, 2009). Table 1 summarizes the dimensions of brand experience found in the literature.

For the current study, four dimensions of brand experience were used following Brakus et al. (2009) – sensory, emotional, intellectual, and behavioural experience – due

to the fact that these types are the most common dimensions used by researchers (Zhang, 2019). Sensory experience refers to the extent to which the experience affects the five senses of the customer (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al., 2019). Emotional experience describes customers' affective engagement with a brand that results in a positive feeling towards the brand (Ebrahim et al., 2016). Thought, curiosity, and problem solving are key components of intellectual brand experience; furthermore, physical actions are the core of behavioural experience (Barnes et al., 2014).

Table 1. Brand experience in the literature

Dimensions	Authors
Physical experience, sensory experience, cognitive experience, social identity experience and affective experience	Schmitt (1999, cited in Hosany & Witham, 2010)
Dining service, food quality, food cuisine, restaurant interior design and other customers.	Andersson and Mossberg (2004)
Social environment, service interface, retail atmosphere, price, retail brand, customer past experience, assortment, and customer experiences in alternative channels.	Verhoef et al. (2009)
Sensory brand experience, affective brand experience, intellectual brand experience, behavioral brand experience brand experience.	Brakus et al. (2009)
Restaurant attributes like food quality, service quality, restaurant atmosphere, and price fairness.	Liu and Jang (2009)
Restaurant environmental factors and customer interactions.	Wu and Liang (2009)
Sensory brand experience, affective brand experience, intellectual brand experience, behavioral brand experience, and relational brand experience.	Nysveen et al. (2013)
Sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience, and behavioral experience.	Barnes et al. (2014)
Sensory brand experience, emotional brand experience, thinking brand experience, action brand experience, and related brand experience.	Zhang (2019)

1.3. Effects of customer experience on customer outcomes

The literature on customer experience can be divided into two types: research on the relative importance of experience aspects (e.g., Andersson & Mossberg, 2004) and research on the effects of customer experience on customer outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions (e.g., Liu & Jang, 2009). Investigating customers' meal experience in luxury-hotel restaurants, Wu and Liang (2009) found that the restaurant environment and customers' interactions with restaurant employees and other customers had a significant effect, either directly or

indirectly, on customer satisfaction. Brakus et al. (2009) conducted a study to develop a scale to measure brand experience and to investigate the impact of brand experience on customer satisfaction as well as loyalty and found that brand experience had a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty either directly or indirectly through brand personality. Nysveen et al. (2013) asserted that brand experience has a significant influence on brand personality, brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

Other related studies on brand experience have pointed out positive effects of this construct on customer outcomes. Prentice et al. (2019) carried out a study on the airline industry to examine the effect of customer-based factors, specifically brand experience and brand love, and firm-based factors on customer engagement and revealed that customer-based factors had a significant influence on customer engagement. Particularly, brand experience had direct and indirect influences on customer engagement. Das et al. (2019) examined the impact of brand experience on brand commitment in the presence of brand passion as a mediating variable and brand ethical perception as a moderating variable. Their results indicated that brand experience was positively related to brand commitment through full mediation of brand passion. According to the results of Shanti et al. (2019), brand experience had significant effects on both brand satisfaction and brand love but not on brand loyalty. Generally stated, brand experience exerts a significant effect on customer satisfaction, loyalty, engagement, and commitment.

Specifically, Iglesias et al. (2019) investigated the influence of sensory brand experience on brand equity as mediated by customer satisfaction and customer affective commitment and the influence of sensory brand experience on customer satisfaction and customer affective commitment as moderated by employee empathy. In terms of the effects of sensory brand experience, it was revealed that this variable had an indirect influence on brand equity when the relationship between these two variables was mediated by customer satisfaction. Employee empathy was found to play a negative moderating role between sensory brand experience and customer satisfaction. Exploring the relationships between five dimensions of brand experience – sensory emotional thinking action and related brand experience, Zhang (2019) underlined a positive impact of these five experiences on brand loyalty. In their examination of the effects of brand experience in the tourism context as measured through sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual experience, Barnes et al. (2014) indicated that visitor satisfaction, intention to recommend, and intention to revisit can be predicted by sensory destination experience.

On the other hand, brand experience has been found to play a significant role in the context of some related variables, like consumers' word of mouth (WOM) regarding the brand itself. Klein et al. (2016) found that brand experience mediated the relationship between brand store characteristics and WOM. Karjaluoto et al. (2016) examined the moderating role of experience and price in the relationship

between brand love and both offline and online word of mouth. The results showed that experience and price were positively related to offline WOM but not to online WOM (eWOM). Furthermore, brand experience emerged as a construct with a significant effect on eWOM (Chen et al., 2014). In Kim et al. (2015) study on brand experience, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the shopping mall context, it was found that brand experience had a significant effect on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand personality. Additionally, satisfaction had a significant effect on customer loyalty. Examining the relationship between restaurant experience and eWOM, the results obtained by Jeong and Jang (2011) indicated that a restaurant's food quality, staff satisfactory experience, and good-quality atmosphere were three indispensable predictors of customers' eWOM.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Brand sensory experience has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Brand emotional experience has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H3: Brand behavioural experience has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H4: Brand intellectual experience has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H5: Brand sensory experience has a significant and positive effect on eWOM.

H6: Brand emotional experience has a significant and positive effect on eWOM.

H7: Brand behavioural experience has a significant and positive effect on eWOM.

H8: Brand intellectual experience has a significant and positive effect on eWOM.

H9: Customer satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on eWOM.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling

A convenience sample of brand restaurant fans on Facebook was used to collect data for the purpose of this study. A total of 311 individuals responded to the request to complete the questionnaire. Data were collected during three days at the beginning of October 2019. Collecting data from Facebook users through the online survey method is a common approach for researchers (Chen et al., 2014).

2.2. Model

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the present study, in which five independent latent variables, namely sensory, emotional, behavioural, intellectual, and satisfaction, were hypothesized to exert significant effects on a dependent latent construct, specifically customers' eWOM, via nine hypotheses (H1–H9). It should be noted here that the objectives of the current study did not include testing the mediating impact of customer satisfaction.

2.3. Instrument

Brand experience was measured using the Brand Experience Scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009), which is a reliable and valid scale encompassing twelve items as open-ended questions delivered to assess four types of brand experience: sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience, and behavioural experience. The items of sensory brand experience in the Brand Experience Scale were used by Iglesias et al. (2019) to measure sensory brand experience. Customer satisfaction was assessed using three items: dining experience, good mood (Al-Tit, 2015), and visualization of food appearance as evaluated through components, colour, shape, layout, and texture (Putra et al., 2018). EWOM was measured by adapting three items used by Chen et al. (2014). The items of the instrument were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from one point (strongly disagree) to five points (strongly agree).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to achieve two goals: (1) to explore the factors' dimensionality
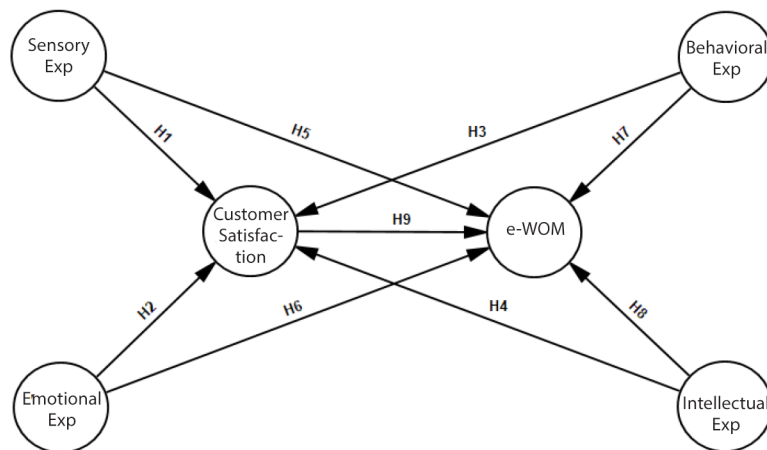

Figure 1. Research conceptual model

and (2) to investigate validity and reliability. The results shown in Table 2 signify that three indicators were loaded on sensory brand experience (XB1, XB2, and XB3) with standardized factor loadings ranging between 0.69 and 0.74. Similarly, three indicators (XB4, XB5, and XB6) were loaded on emotional brand experience. Their standardized factor loadings were 0.78, 0.75, and 0.71, respectively. Behavioural brand experience, according to the results, was related to three indicators (XB7, XB8, and XB9), with standardized factor loadings ranging between 0.68 and 0.83. Moreover, three indicators were loaded on intellectual brand experience (XB10, XB11, and XB12), with standardized factor loadings ranging between 0.88 and 0.94.

Table 2. Results of EFA

Factors and indicators	Items	SFL	AVE	CR	α
Sensory brand experience	BX1	0.74	0.514	0.760	0.751
	BX2	0.72			
	BX3	0.69			
Emotional brand experience	BX4	0.78	0.558	0.791	0.782
	BX5	0.75			
	BX6	0.71			
Behavioral brand experience	BX7	0.83	0.576	0.802	0.793
	BX8	0.76			
	BX9	0.68			
Intellectual brand experience	BX10	0.76	0.563	0.794	0.782
	BX11	0.74			
	BX12	0.75			
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.84	0.657	0.851	0.832
	CS2	0.81			
	CS3	0.78			
e-WOM	eWOM1	0.94	0.835	0.938	0.921
	eWOM2	0.92			
	eWOM3	0.88			

On the other hand, all the values of the average variance extracted (AVE) were greater than 0.50 (Al-Ayed, 2019; Almohaimmeed, 2017; Al-Tit, 2016), which indicated that validity was assured. Reliability was also supported; that is, the composite reliability (CR) values and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) were greater than 0.7 (Al-Tit et al., 2019; Sweis et al., 2013).

3.2. Model fit

Five model fit indices were used to explore the extent to which the current model fit the data as shown in Figure 2. Table 3 asserted that the current model was acceptable (Shi et al., 2019). According to Hooper et al. (2008), the chi-squared test, GFI (goodness-of-fit index), AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit index), and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) are three indices of absolute fit

and the CFI (comparative fit index) is one of the incremental fit indices. The authors explained that the absolute fit indices represent a measure of the goodness of model fit in comparison with no model while the incremental fit indices depend on a baseline model.

Table 3. Results of model fit

Index	Value	Criterion
Chi-square ratio (CMIN/DF)	2.27	>3.00
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.91	>0.90
Adjusted for Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.88	>0.90
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.942	>0.90
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation RMSEA)	0.051	<0.08

3.3. Structural model

Figure 3 displays the structural model used in the current study to test its hypotheses. A detailed presentation of the regression coefficients with their associated t-value and significance values can be seen in Table 4.

In light of the results in Table 4, all the dimensions of brand experience, that is, sensory (ß = 0.16, t = 3.74, p < 0.05), emotional (ß = 0.48, t = 17.357, p < 0.05) and behavioural experiences (ß = 0.35, t = 13.614, p < 0.05), except intellectual brand experience (ß = 0.05, t = 0.8, p > 0.05), were found to be significant predictors of customer satisfaction.
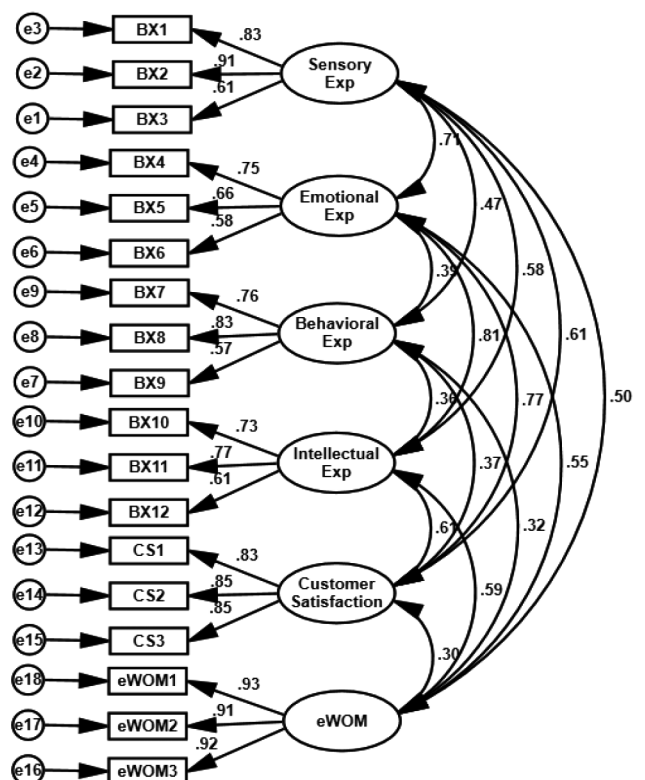

Figure 2. Research measurement model

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What is more, sensory brand experience had a significant effect on eWOM (ß = 0.30, t = 11.22, p < 0.05), emotional brand experience exerted a significant effect on

Table 4. Results of the hypothesis testing

Path			ß	t-value	P value
Sensory brand experience	→	Customer satisfaction	0.16	3.742	0.0000
Emotional brand experience	→	Customer satisfaction	0.48	17.357	0.001
Behavioral brand experience	→	Customer satisfaction	0.35	13.614	0.002
Intellectual brand experience	→	Customer satisfaction	0.05	0.759	0.342
Sensory brand experience	→	Customer eWOM	0.30	11.224	0.001
Emotional brand experience	→	Customer eWOM	0.17	3.882	0.000
Behavioral brand experience	→	Customer eWOM	0.12	3.427	0.000
Intellectual brand experience	→	Customer eWOM	0.08	1.132	0.415
Customer satisfaction	→	Customer eWOM	0.56	21.367	0.002

eWOM (ß = 0.17, t = 3.88, p < 0.05), and behavioural brand experience significantly predicted eWOM (ß = 0.12, t = 3.43, p < 0.05), while intellectual brand experience had no significant effect on eWOM (ß = 0.08, t = 1.13, p > 0.05). Customer satisfaction had a significant effect on eWOM (ß = 0.56, t = 21.37, p < 0.05). Based on these results, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H5, H6, and H7 were supported by the current data. That is, sensory, emotional, and behavioural brand experiences affected customer satisfaction while intellectual brand experience (H4 and H8) had no such effect. Additionally, H9 was supported.

The results of the current study are not the first of their kind, as previous studies have obtained similar results with the exception of the result concerning intellectual experience and its impact on customer satisfaction. Sensory experience was measured in the present study by reference to the strong impression that comes as a result of the characteristics of the restaurant and food, and their attractive impact on the senses of consumers has been shown in previous studies as having an impact on customer satisfaction. The emotional experience, measured in the study using positive emotions formed due to the restaurant and food experience, has an impact on customer satisfaction. In contrast, the behavioural experience reflects the actions of the customers or how they are encouraged to act by the brand. Finally, the intellectual experience was measured by thinking or problem solving during the interaction with the brand. Examples of studies that have agreed with the current findings include Iglesias et al. (2019), Shanti et al.
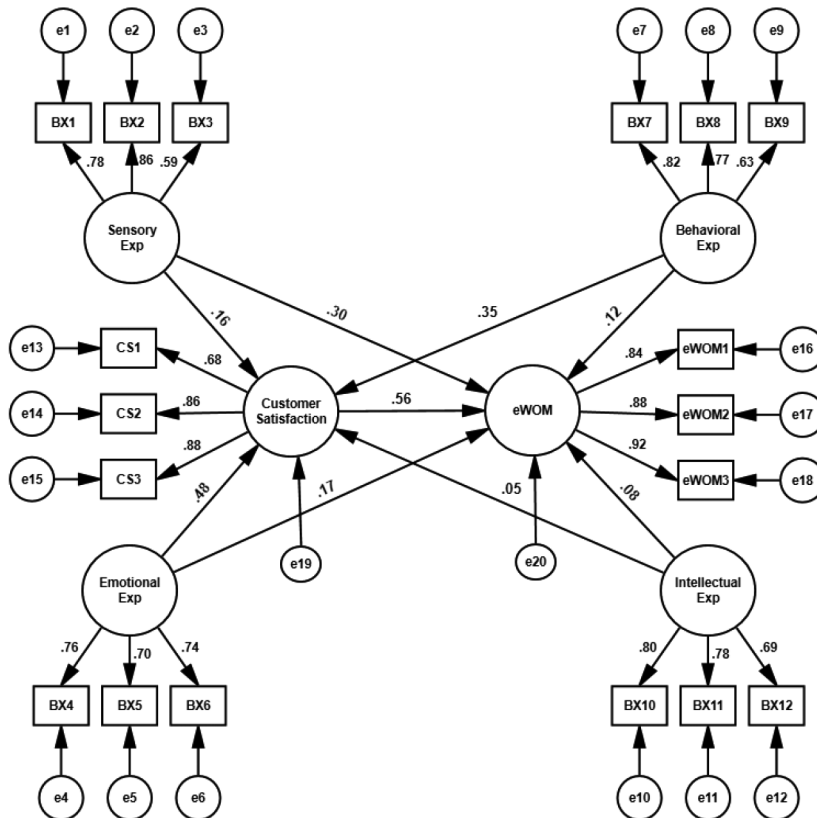

Figure 3. Research structural model

(2019), and Zhang (2019). In terms of the effect of brand experience on eWOM, this study's results are similar to those shown by Jeong and Jang's (2011) study. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have been conducted on the non-significant effect of intellectual brand experience on customer satisfaction and eWOM.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this study was to explore the effects of four dimensions of brand experience, that is, sensory, emotional, behavioural, and intellectual brand experience, on customer satisfaction and customer eWOM and to investigate the effect of customer satisfaction on customer eWOM. The results showed that sensory, emotional, and behavioural brand experience are three crucial predictors of customer satisfaction and eWOM. Intellectual brand experience was found to exert no significant impact on customer satisfaction and eWOM.

Understanding different types of consumer experience is important in several ways. First, it is necessary to understand the needs of consumers as consumers who visit a restaurant are not only affected by the quality of the food but also have a sensory, emotional, and behavioural experience. Second, it is possible to understand the experience that is formed by consumers when interacting with the restaurant to determine the most suitable marketing strategy to meet customer needs and produce satisfaction. Therefore, restaurants can encourage customers to spread positive publicity about them through social media, especially in light of the large spread of these media. Third, restaurants can make adjustments to the way in which they manage their business and provide food and services. Fourth, consumers' positive word-of-mouth assurance is closely linked to customer satisfaction. Thus, customer satisfaction must be achieved first.

Surprisingly, the results of the study showed that customers' behavioural experience has an impact on customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth. The reason for this may be that the nature of the restaurants that the respondents mentioned is open and includes open spaces that encourage physical actions, such as restaurants in resorts, which offer possibilities of walking, sitting by the pool, watching the landscape, swimming in the pool, and other activities.

In the light of the foregoing conclusions, the study recommends that restaurant owners and managers should consider the results of the current study by focusing on the sensory experience of the customers, which includes all the human senses, as well as on their emotional experience, as this increases the relationship between the customers and the restaurant, especially as those emotions become memories for them. One of the most important recommendations of the study here is to try to achieve a positive customer experience in all aspects, whether in terms of food or in terms of other aspects of the restaurant. There are some recommendations for researchers, such as conducting future studies to detect the impact of customers' intellectual experience, as the results of the current study indicate that it does not affect customer satisfaction or word of mouth. Researchers are also required to identify the impact of the above-mentioned experiments using different institutions or brands.

Customer demographic characteristics have gained considerable attention in marketing research. Wägar and Lindqvist (2010) examined the perceptions of older and younger customer contact persons, and Foster and Resnick (2013) explored the influence of some characteristics of service workers, like gender and age, on customer service perceptions. Rahman (2012) tested the mediating role of such characteristics in the relationship between customer perception and behaviour. Parahoo et al. (2014) investigated the influence of passengers' age on their usage of metro and tram services. Zniva and Weitzl (2016) reviewed the literature on older customer behaviour. Kylkilahti and Autio (2018) focused on the tactics of younger customers in daily service interactions. Afthinos et al. (2005) identified customer service expectations due to particular patterns, like gender and age. Therefore, researchers are called to consider customer demographic characteristics in their marketing research, particularly regarding brand experience, satisfaction, and loyalty. The practical implications of this study determine when consumers search for brand experiences when they are shopping and consuming brands.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, the sample of the study consisted of Facebook users, and they were asked what they thought about their experiences when interacting with certain brands or places. Second, the focus of the study questionnaire was on restaurants. It is possible that the respondents expressed their opinion having not necessarily lived any of these experiences, as the questionnaires were distributed over the Internet and not in the restaurants themselves. Finally, the responses were determined in the light of the items adopted from Brakus et al. (2009) to measure brand experience in addition to other items taken from Al-Tit (2015), Chen et al. (2014), and Putra et al. (2018) to assess customer satisfaction and eWOM.

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