EFFECTS OF SERVICE EXPERIENCE ON CUSTOMER RESPONSES TO THE HOTEL CHAIN

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses customer experience in a hotel and its impact on the customer attitudes to both the individual hotel and the hotel chain. Specifically, the study focuses on the effects on emotions, satisfaction, attitude to hotel chain, intention to return, skepticism to negative information and WOM. In order to test the hypotheses, an empirical study was carried out in a sample of 300 individuals. Data was analysed through structural equation modelling, and results show that customer experiences in an individual hotel determine not only their responses to the hotel but also their responses to the hotel chain. Among all the considered outcomes, the stronger effects are found on WOM

Keywords:

Service experience, Hotel chain, Customer emotions, skepticism

1. Introduction

In the last decade, the topic of customer experience with the brand is gaining importance in management. The development of new methods and practices in businesses together with the appearance of recent academic works with original proposals and metrics is fostering the interest of researchers and practitioners (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2015). In order to manage the customer experience, brand managers carefully monitorize the different touchpoints between the brand and the customer. The aim is to align all these touchpoints with the brand promise in order to build a specific brand experience (Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011).

In comparison with physical products, the experience lived by the consumer in a service is particularly crucial because of its intangible nature. In services industries, a prior positive experience lived by a customer with the brand may act as a powerful determinant of the customer attitude towards the brand and future behaviours. This applies to the particular sector of tourism and the hospitality industry, where a customer experience with a particular hotel will be a trust generator that may influence their attitude and behavior to the hotel brand (Xu & Chan, 2010; So & King, 2010). Hotel managers aims to ensure positive and multidimensional experiences for its customers in order to gain a differentiated position in their minds (Xu & Chan, 2010). A well-managed hotel brand should be able to satisfy experiential needs in order to create positive experiences (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Even if the literature in the hotel industry is ample, there are gaps that still needs to be fulfilled. Comparatively to other aspects, there is a small number of studies in branding within this sector (Kayaman & Arasli, 2007; So & King, 2010). Besides, some authors claim the paucity of knowledge about the experience of hotel guests (Xu & Chan, 2010). To the best of our knowledge, there is a lack of empirical research on the impact that the customer experience in an individual hotel brand (e.g. NH Madrid Atocha) may have on the customer attitude and behavior to the hotel chain brand (e.g. NH hotels). Accordingly, our main goal in this paper is to analyse the impact that service experience in an individual hotel may have on customer response towards the hotel chain. Specifically, this work studies the effect of service experience in emotions and satisfaction towards the individual hotel, and how these emotions and satisfaction may in turn affect the customer attitude to the hotel chain, and in consequence, determine customer intention to return to the hotel chain, customer skepticism towards negative information about the hotel brand and WOM.

The results obtained from this work may contribute to the academic literature and managerial practice. From the perspective of academic research, this paper develop and empirically test an original model that integrates the customer experience in an individual hotel and the customer response to the hotel chain. This model includes variables that are recently considered in the literature, such as skepticism towards negative information in combination with more traditional outcomes such as intention to return or WOM. The inclusion of all these variables in the same model may also help to see in which aspects a customer experience in a hotel may produce stronger or lesser effects in the customer response to the hotel chain. From the managerial standpoint, the results obtained in this empirical work may contribute to determine the effects of each aspect that compose the service experience on the emotions and satisfaction of the customer. The results obtained may help managers to allocate resources accordingly. Besides, the analysis of the effects on the customer response to the hotel chain may be also of interest for hotel managers, contributing to show the extent of these effects.

The structure of this paper is as follows. It opens with a literature review where the conceptual model is presented and hypotheses are developed. This is followed by the methodology and the analysis of empirical findings. Finally, the paper ends with the conclusions, implications and limitations of the research.

2. Literature review

Prior literature refers to the customer experience with the brand with different terms such as customer experience, brand experience or service experience (Berry, 2000; Grace & O'Cass, 2004; So & King, 2010; Pansari & Kumar 2017). The concept of customer experience uses the perspective of the consumer, whereas the term brand experience draws on the perspective of the company brand. The latter may apply not only to the customer but also to the rest of stakeholders. In the case of services, the concept brand experience is also used to differentiate the experience of physical products. In this work we analyse the customer experience with the brand in a particular service that is the hotel industry, therefore any of these terms could be applicable to this case. Given that we are using the same approach as Grace and O'Cass for measuring the experience, we are going to use also the same term as this authors, which is service experience.

The model proposed in this paper analyse the effects of service experience on customer emotions and satisfaction towards a specific hotel, and in turn, its impact on customer attitude towards the hotel chain. Following the work by Grace & O'Cass (2004), three different dimensions have been considered in order to study service experience: core service, employee service and servicescape. Besides the aforementioned variables, the model focuses on three final outcomes that are intention to return to the hotel chain, skepticism towards negative information, and word-of-mouth (WOM). This model can be seen in Figure 1. All the relations refer to the hypotheses that are going to be tested in this work.

FIGURE 1
Model proposed
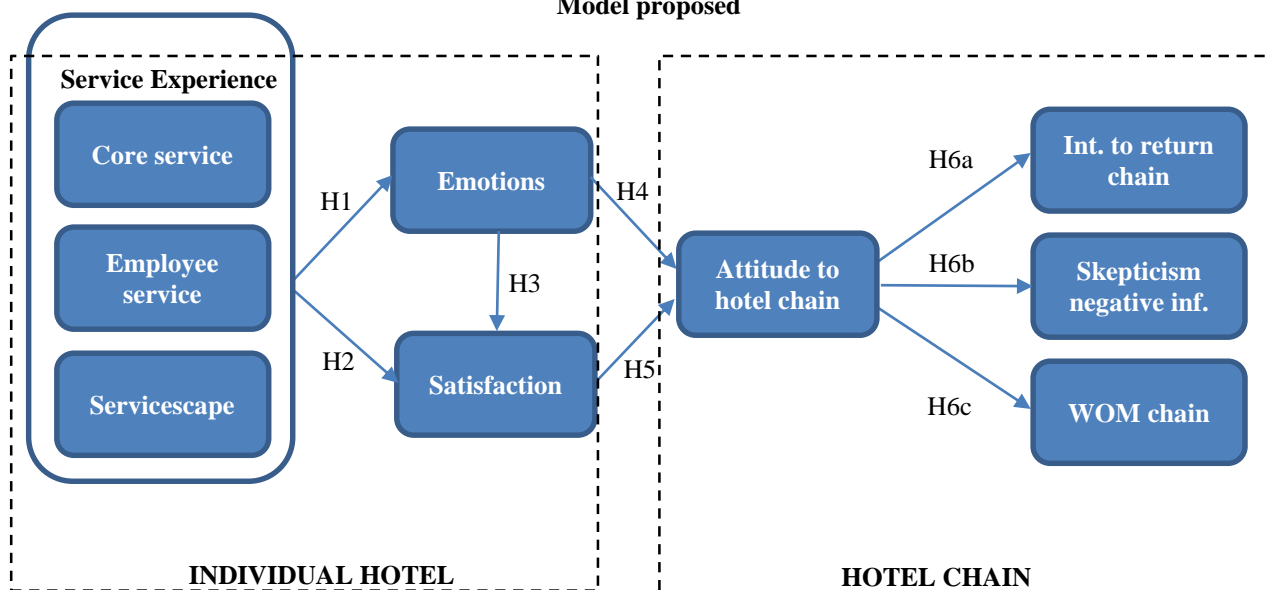
Regarding the effects of service experience on customer emotions, the experience lived by the customer with a particular service brand is going to produce an immediate

emotional response in that customer. Verhoef et al. (2009) posit that customer experience *"involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical response to the entity, product and service"*. Thus among other outcomes, service experience produces an emotional response in the customer, and superior brand experiences may promote strong emotional responses (Bitner, 1992; Iglesias et al., 2011).

There is a vast array of literature dealing with the antecedents of emotions and customer aroused feelings. The reason is that these emotions and feelings determine customer reactions and purchase behaviours (Babin & Babin, 2001; Grace & O'Cass, 2004), which in turn determine the economic performance of the companies. There are many different classifications of emotions, dealing with different feelings such as joy, anger, sadness, guilt, fear, pleasantness, excitement, etc. (Ali, Hussain & Omar, 2016). Despite emotions are difficult to classify in terms of positive or negative, a customer pleased or relaxed as a result of a service experience is more likely to be satisfied than a customer that is nervous or annoyed (Burns & Neisner, 2006; Brakus et al., 2009).

In the hospitality industry, Jani & Han (2011) posit that service-encounters are crucial in the customer experience to determine customer emotions. The service received from the hotel personnel may trigger positive or negative emotions in the customer, and every service-encounter between the customer and the personnel may produce different emotions. The personnel is the human connection between the company brand and the customer (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Due to this importance, Alloza (2008) refers to employees as the agents that bring to life the values and brand positioning of the company.

Nevertheless, the personnel is not the only dimension of the service experience that has potential to determine the customer emotions. The core service and the servicescape are also relevant factors to consider. Lengthy waits, uncomfortable rooms, or generally speaking, a service that does not suit the needs of the customer may provoke negative emotional responses (Grace & O'Cass, 2004). On the opposite side, a customer perception of an extraordinary service experience may result in positive emotional responses, and lead the hotel brand to differentiate from the rest (Iglesias et al., 2011). In consequence, hotel managers try to stimulate customer senses and feelings with a prompt service, a careful employee behaviour, facilities and rooms that are aligned with the customer preferences.

Previous works have empirically shown the relationship between different aspects of the service experience and the customer emotions (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Iglesias et al, 2011; Lin & Liang, 2011; Ali, Hussain & Omar, 2016). In our particular context, we also expect that service experience will have a positive effect on the customer emotions. Therefore we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Service experience has a positive effect on brand emotions

Service experience and customer emotions can also affect the level of customer satisfaction with the service brand. Customer satisfaction with the brand is the response to both tangible and intangible brand stimuli, and it depends on customer prior expectations with the brand (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012). Thus, aspects related to the core service, employee service and servicescape are stimuli susceptible to affect also customer satisfaction. Service experiences provide value to the customer, and this value may lead to satisfaction when expectations of the customer are met (Brakus et al., 2009).

The effects of service experience and emotions on satisfaction have been studied from different streams of research. Environmental psychology, marketing and organizational

research have analysed the impact of the diverse aspects of service experience. There are studies that focus on the effects of the physical environment and specific design factors on customer satisfaction (Chang, 2000; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Lin & Liang, 2011), whereas other works deal with aspects of the servicescape or the core service (Bitner, 1992; Leong, Ang & Low, 1997; Babin & Babin, 2001). Some of these studies have also proved empirically these effects of service experience (Han & Back, 2007; Ali et al., 2016), and it is important to remark that the effects of service experience on satisfaction have been confirmed both directly and indirectly via customer emotions (Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Lin & Liang, 2011).

Moreover, the impact of customer experience on satisfaction has been proved in diverse sectors such as cars, banks, dental services, or hairstylists (McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Grace & O'Cass, 2004; Iglesias et al, 2011). In the light of these works, we may also expect in this particular context of hotel services to find a positive effect of service experience on customer satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through brand emotions. Thus, we propose:

H2: Service experience has a positive effect on brand satisfaction
H3: Brand emotions have a positive effect on brand satisfaction

Having positive experiences during their stay in terms of emotions and satisfaction should likely improve the customers' attitude towards the chain as a whole. In their empirical model tested on the banking sector, Grace & O'Cass (2004) showed that the brand attitude is directly influenced by satisfaction and indirectly by the aroused feelings in the service experience. However, we propose that emotions can also have a direct effect on the attitude toward the chain.

Drawing on Wernerfelt's (1988) "signaling theory", Erdem (1998) showed that brand experience is a sign of the quality of any other product associated with the brand, reducing the risk of acquisition and increasing the consumers' utility. In general, experience is one of the main determinants of brand perceptions and assessments (So & King, 2010; Shen & Liu, 2015) as well as the formation of brand images (Keller, 1993).

In the retail sector, researchers report the existence of reciprocal relationships between consumers' attitude toward specific stores and the attitude towards their chains (Chebat, Sirgy & St-James, 2006; Helgesen, Havold & Nesset, 2010; Swoboda, Berg & Schramm-Klein, 2013; Van Lin & Gijsbrechts 2014). In the hotel industry, So & King (2010) found that the experience with a particular chain influences the chain's brand equity. However, clients appear to be more loyal to chains than to individual hotels (Pimpao et al., 2014), which would demonstrate that the attitude towards the chain is a more holistic construct and less dependent on experiences in a specific establishment.

In general, studies conducted in the context of services reveal that consumer satisfaction, as a result of the gap between expectations and perceptions, will influence the brand attitude (Shin & Elliot, 2001; Krystallis & Chrysochou 2014) . This attitude will also depend on specific emotions arising from the consumer's interaction with the brand (Ivens et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016). Therefore, for the specific case of hotels, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4. Brand emotions have a positive effect on the hotel chain attitude
H5: Brand satisfaction has a positive effect on the hotel chain attitude

In the marketing literature, there is a consensus that brand loyalty depends on the overall consumer disposition toward the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Drawing on hierarch of effects' theory, brand attitude will be the intermediate link between consumer perceptions and their buying behavior (Fishbein &

Ajzen, 1975; Barry, 2002). In this work, we consider three behavioral responses of the consumer that reflect both their loyalty and their engagement: intention to return, skepticisms towards negative information and WOM.

By analysing different sectors, including the tourism sector, brand attitude has been found to influence purchase intentions (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schafer, 2012; Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014) and recommendations (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014). In retailing, there is also empirical evidence on the effect of brand attitude on these two factors (Hutter & Hoffmann, 2014).

Despite being a novel variable in the literature, Wolter & Cronin (2016) consider skepticism towards negative information as a customer-based outcome at the same level that other traditional variables like word-of-mouth or attitudinal loyalty (purchase intentions). They found that consumers emotionally identified with a company are less likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth and are more skeptical towards the negative information they can find about the company on a written report. Since the brand attitude has an emotional nature, it is not risky to expect a similar relationship as regards with the effect of chain attitude on the different customer outcomes. Hence, we state:

H6a: Hotel chain attitude has a positive effect on intention to return

H6b: Hotel chain attitude has a positive effect on skepticism towards negative information

H6c: Hotel chain attitude has a positive effect on WOM

3. Methodology

In order to test the hypotheses, an empirical study was carried out in Spain in the first quarter of 2017. The aim was to analyse the consumers' opinions regarding their last stay in a hotel chain with three stars or more. Data was gathered by means of a telephone survey driven by a market research company. The sample was composed by 300 individuals, with 298 valid responses. Characteristics of the final sample can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Sample composition

Gender	
Men	39.6%
Women	60.4%
Age	
From 18 to 30	11.1%
From 31 to 40	20.8%
From 41 to 50	28.2%
From 51 to 65	31.2%
More than 65	8.7%

Regarding the variable measurement, the scales used in this study were previously tested in the literature. Some of them were adapted to the specific context, and all of them are ten-point Likert scales. Composition of the scales and their references to prior works are shown in Table 2. Information regarding means, standard deviations, skew, kurtosis is also included.

TABLE 2
Composition of the scales

Scales	Mean	St. Dev.	Skew	Kurtosis

SERVICE EXPERIENCE (based on Grace & O'Cass, 2004; So & King, 2010)

Core Service

CORE1	The hotel suits my needs	8.45	1.17	-0.51	0.27
CORE2	It is reliable	8.17	1.21	-0.33	-0.09
CORE3	It is superior to other hotels	7.81	1.49	-0.96	1.52
CORE4	It is a good service	8.33	1.27	-0.91	1.43
CORE5	It is a quality service	8.24	1.30	-0.92	1.37

Employee Service

EMPL1	Employees provide a prompt service	8.29	1.17	-0.95	1.88
EMPL2	They are willing to help	8.24	1.22	-0.68	0.79
EMPL3	They are never too busy for me	8.03	1.27	-0.75	1.13
EMPL4	I can trust employees	8.27	1.26	-0.70	0.79
EMPL5	I feel safe with them	8.39	1.27	-0.69	0.30
EMPL6	Employees are polite	8.83	1.07	-0.68	0.11
EMPL7	They give personal attention	8.00	1.42	-0.94	2.68

Servicescape

SCAPE1	Employees are neat	8.59	1.16	-0.74	0.63
SCAPE2	Facilities suit service type	8.29	1.26	-1.18	3.52
SCAPE3	Facilities are up-to-date	8.08	1.33	-1.19	3.58
SCAPE4	Facilities are attractive	8.33	1.26	-0.87	1.43

EMOTIONS (based on Pratt, 1980; Mattila & Wirtz, 2000)

EMO1	My stay in the hotel was pleasant	8.61	1.12	-0.77	0.79
EMO2	My stay in the hotel was relaxing	8.11	1.44	-0.87	1.11
EMO3	My stay in the hotel was arousing	7.64	1.50	-0.48	-0.04
EMO4	My stay in the hotel was exciting	7.48	1.60	-0.43	-0.33

SATISFACTION (based on Ali et al., 2016)

SAT1	I am satisfied with my decision to stain in this hotel	8.61	1.23	-0.84	0.89
SAT2	My choice to stay in this hotel was a wise one	8.62	1.30	-1.21	2.71
SAT3	I think I did the right thing when I chose to stay in this hotel	8.69	1.32	-1.18	1.48

ATTITUDE TO HOTEL CHAIN (based on Ferraro, Kirmani & Matherly, 2013)

ATT1	I like this hotel chain	8.29	1.23	-0.93	1.69
ATT2	I have a favourable opinion of this hotel chain	8.33	1.19	-0.98	1.81
ATT3	It is a good hotel chain	8.41	1.24	-1.22	2.72

INTENTION TO RETURN (based on Kim, Kim & Kim, 2009)

INT1	I'm likely to come back to this hotel chain in the future	7.98	1.70	-1.24	2.18
INT2	In my next stay in a hotel, I will consider this hotel chain as my first option	7.49	1.70	-1.27	2.70

SKEPTICISM NEGATIVE INFORMATION (based on Wolter & Cronin, 2016)
(imagine that you read a piece of news stating that this hotel chain is one of the worst in the industry. How would you react to this news?)

NEGA1	There is no way that this chain could be one of the worst chain in its industry	8.15	1.66	-1.00	0.81
NEGA2	I would refuse to believe this piece of news	7.77	1.87	-1.06	0.89
NEGA3	This piece of news can't be trusted	7.87	1.93	-1.06	0.91

WOM CHAIN (based on Rondán, Arenas & Ramírez, 2015)

WOM1	I'm likely to say good things about this hotel chain	8.50	1.42	-1.22	1.94
WOM2	I would recommend this hotel chain to my family	8.40	1.56	-1.44	2.91

WOM3	If my friends were looking for a hotel, I would tell them to visit this chain	8.11	1.55	-1.10	1.48

Note: All the factors were measured by means of 10 point Likert scales. Standard error in skew was 0.141 and in Kurtosis 0.281

The potential existence of problems related to common method bias was controlled through procedural and statistical methods (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In relation to procedural methods, the study guarantees the respondent's anonymity and confidentiality of the information. With regard to the statistical procedures, an additional and non-related question was included in the questionnaire in order to control for the common method bias. As expected, this question was not highly correlated with the concepts analysed in the study. Besides, a Harman's one-factor test was also conducted by means of confirmatory factor analysis using EQS 6.2. This test showed that the goodness of fit for a measurement model in which all the variables loaded on a single factor was substantially lower than the goodness of fit for a model where every item loaded on its corresponding latent variable. All in all, there is no evidence to suggest the presence of common method bias.

4. Results

Once the data was gathered, the first step was to depurate the scales and to analyse their validity and reliability before testing the model. Due to the multidimensional nature of service experience, this construct was operationalised as a second-order factor model following a two-step approximation method (Chin 2010). Thus, the construct was composed by three factors: core service, employee service and servicescape. The model was tested using Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression, with SmartPLS software. In comparison to traditional covariance-based structural equation modelling, this methodology is appropriate when the interest of the study focusses on prediction and on theory development rather than on strong theory confirmation (Reinartz et al., 2009). Accordingly, given the scope of this research, which focusses on predicting different dependent variables such as emotions and satisfaction to a specific hotel, attitude to the hotel chain and other outcomes. Besides, the use of PLS is preferable when the model, as in our case, includes a large number of indicators and latent variables and when the data are non-normally distributed (Chin, 2010; Ringle et al., 2012). Regarding convergent validity, all the factor loadings were above the common thresholds of 0.5 (see Table 3). In relation to the reliability properties, the results show that the values of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs were above the widely accepted limits of 0.8, 0.7 and 0.5 respectively.

TABLE 3
Results of the reliability and convergent validity analyses

	Indicator	Lambda	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Core Service	CORE1	0.82	0.90	0.93	0.72
	CORE2	0.80			
	CORE3	0.83			
	CORE4	0.90			
	CORE5	0.90			
Employee service	EMPL1	0.84	0.92	0.94	0.69
	EMPL2	0.85			
	EMPL3	0.85			
	EMPL4	0.84			

	EMPL5	0.83			
	EMPL6	0.79			
	EMPL7	0.80			
Servicescape	SCAPE1	0.76	0.86	0.91	0.71
	SCAPE2	0.90			
	SCAPE3	0.84			
	SCAPE4	0.86			
Emotions	EMO1	0.85	0.89	0.92	0.75
	EMO2	0.88			
	EMO3	0.91			
	EMO4	0.83			
Satisfaction	SAT1	0.96	0.95	0.97	0.92
	SAT2	0.96			
	SAT3	0.95			
Attitude to hotel chain	ATT1	0.95	0.95	0.97	0.90
	ATT2	0.96			
	ATT3	0.94			
Intention to return	INT1	0.93	0.84	0.92	0.86
	INT2	0.93			
Skepticism negative information	NEGA1	0.92	0.93	0.95	0.87
	NEGA2	0.95			
	NEGA3	0.93			
Positive WOM	WOM1	0.94	0.92	0.95	0.86
	WOM2	0.93			
	WOM3	0.91			

Finally, discriminant validity of the scales was analysed by comparing every construct's AVE with the squared correlation of that construct in relation to the rest of variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In all cases, the AVE for any two constructs was always greater than the squared correlations and therefore discriminant validity was supported for the scales.

Table 4 shows the results of the structural model proposed in Figure 1. To assess the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrap resampling technique with 5.000 subsamples was used. Results revealed that all the factorial loadings were significant at 5%. The Stone-Geisser test criterion (Q^2) exceeded the threshold of 0 for all the dependent variables, supporting the predictive relevance of the model. Finally, the R^2 values of the dependent variables were also above the common threshold of 10%.

TABLE 4
Results of the structural model

Hypotheses	β	t-value	Q^2	R^2
H1: Service experience → Emotions	0.72	22.17*	0.75	0.52
H2: Service experience → Satisfaction	0.67	13.33*	0.91	0.68
H3: Emotions → Satisfaction	0.19	3.34*		
H4: Emotions → Attitude to hotel chain	0.28	4.60*	0.90	0.63
H5: Satisfaction → Attitude to hotel chain	0.58	10.88*		
H6a: Attitude hotel chain → Intention to return	0.59	9.97*	0.86	0.35
H6b: Attitude hotel chain → Skepticism negative information	0.52	9.36*	0.87	0.27
H6c: Attitude hotel chain → WOM chain	0.79	25.11*	0.86	0.62

Note: * = significant at p<0.05

Thus, we proceeded to analyse each of the hypotheses proposed in this model. As seen in Table 4, all of them were supported. Regarding hypothesis 1, the path coefficient was

positive and significant which lead to accept the positive effect of service experience on emotions (β=0.72, p<0.05). This means that the overall experience lived by the consumer with the individual hotel produced emotions. The more positive the service experience is, the more pleasant, relaxing, arousing and exciting the emotions are.

In relation to hypotheses 2 and 3, we can see from the summary table that satisfaction was also determined by service experience (β=0.67, p<0.05) and emotions (β=0.19, p<0.05). These results give support to both hypotheses. Thus, service experience with the hotel affects both customer emotions and satisfaction. Given the similar beta coefficients, the effects seems to be also similar. Besides, the model shows that satisfaction is in turn determined by emotions.

Hypotheses 4 to 6 refer to the effects on the hotel chain. We can see from the table that customer emotions to the individual hotel positively affect attitude to hotel chain (β=0.28, p<0.05). Moreover, customer satisfaction to the individual hotel also determines a positive influence on attitude to hotel chain (β=0.58, p<0.05). In consequence, hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5 are supported. Finally, the summary table shows that attitude to the hotel chain also exerts positive effects on intention to return (β=0.59, p<0.05), skepticism towards negative information (β=0.52, p<0.05) and WOM (β=0.79, p<0.05) which gives support to hypotheses 6a, 6b and 6c.

5. Conclusions

The choice of one strategy or another is fundamental to business success in the hotel industry (Kim & Kim 2005; Xu & Chan, 2010), where a number of brands have emerged. Despite their higher average prices, branded hotel chains outperform non-branded properties on the level of occupancy, revenues and return on investment (Forgacs, 2003). However, when it comes to the management of hotel brands, it is important to know the implications of associating a particular hotel with a well-known brand.

In this work, an empirical model was proposed to learn how consumers' perceptions about a particular hotel influence their attitude towards the chain as a whole. All proposed relationships were supported, which corroborates the academic and practical utility of the model.

First, and confirming the results obtained by Grace & O'Cass (2004), it was found that the service experience influences both emotions and satisfaction, and there is also a direct relationship between the latter two factors. According to Punsari & Kumar (2017), the satisfaction and the emotions generated in the interaction between the consumer and the brand constitute the main antecedents of the customer engagement, psychological process driving customer loyalty (Bowden, 2009). In our model, both factors exerted a significant impact on the hotel chain attitude, which determined, in turn, the future behaviour of the customer with respect to the chain. In particular, it was observed that the attitude towards the hotel chain has a positive effect on intention to return, skepticism about negative information and, to a greater effect, on WOM.

The results obtained hold implications that can be useful to companies operating in this sector. The results indicate the importance of taking care of the individuals' experience in all their interactions with the brand. Consumers are keen to repeat pleasurable experiences (Brakus et al., 2009), which means that a positive experience in a particular hotel will end up benefiting the entire chain. The truth is that much work remains to be done, since hotel brands are spreading and consumers perceive few differences between them (So and King 2010).

In addition to satisfying customers through rational benefits, a path of differentiation can consist of providing them with emotional benefits. These benefits may result from meeting customers' expectations as well as triggering positive emotions, through which they will remember their stay as pleasant, relaxing, arousing, and exciting. This will only be achieved by tracking the customer experience in relation to each element of the core service, employee attitude, and servicescape. The study found that the main benefit of the entire process is WOM, which is encouraging for the chains that struggle to find ways to obtain new customers.

Today, a major threat to traditional hotels comes from new types of competitors such as Airbnb that focus on the consumer segment most concerned about price. Large chains have responded by launching new brands exclusively targeted at this segment such as "Tru by Hilton" and Moxy (Marriott) (Elliott, 2016). According to the results, perceptions about a particular hotel can affect attitudes and behaviours toward the chain as a whole. Thus, to the extent that a reputed brand (e.g., Hilton) is associated with low-cost hotels, a negative feedback could arise. This feedback could be even greater in the premium segment customers, which should be studied in future works.

It must be taken into account that all data collected refer to hotels of known chains of three or more stars. Therefore, this study disregards other models of establishment with different customer profiles, just as in the case of Airbnb. Business tourism was also ruled out, since the purchasing behaviour is different and depends on other criteria. Addressing these gaps may be an option for future research. Moreover, future work could aim at replicating the model in other services sectors. Given that all hypotheses were robustly confirmed, the model could be useful to understand the interaction between individual and umbrella brands across sectors such as retailing, banks, health services, etc.

As in other works, the proposed model constitutes a simplification of reality, but not reality itself. Thus, the full spectrum of factors and variables that could influence the behaviour and attitudes of the individual are not contemplated. For example, to measure a construct as rich as emotions, the study is limited to the four most cited emotional states in previous studies. In the same way, the study focuses on the experience with a particular hotel, asking participants about their most recent or memorable experience within the last two years. Thus, future work should analyse the differential effect of different experiences with different hotels in the chain, as well as the experiences provided by the holiday destination itself. The inclusion of destination image in the model could capture the interest not only of private companies in the hotel sector but also of the public administrations responsible for promoting local tourism.

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