

Brand Equity and Cleanliness Regarding Brand Experience, Consumer Well-Being and Customer Satisfaction Within the Restaurant Sector

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Abstract: This study was conducted with the aim of finding the relationships between the variables Cleanliness (CLL) and Brand Equity (BEQ) in relation to Brand Experience (BE), Customer Well-Being (CWB) and Customer Satisfaction (CS) within the restaurant sector. The study population consisted of people who have eaten on the premises in restaurants in Peru during the last six months of the year 2021. The sample consisted of 416 people. A PLS-SEM analysis was used using SmartPLS 3 software in order to respond to the hypotheses set out in the study. The results allowed all the hypotheses to be tested, highlighting the confirmation of the influence of Cleanliness and Brand Equity on Customer Well-being in building Brand Experience and Customer Satisfaction in the restaurant sector.

Keywords: cleanliness, consumer well-being, customer satisfaction, brand experience, brand equity, restaurants, PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the restaurant sector in Peru, which has become an international powerhouse of cuisine (Ontaneda & Quiroga, 2020), allowing it to be recognised for the sixth time as the "World's Best Culinary Destination" in 2018. (PromPerú, 2019).

However, in 2019, the situation in the sector changed radically as a result of Covid-19, due to mobility restrictions, social distancing, and the perception that restaurants were establishments where infection was possible, which led to a significant decrease in custom (Bartik et al., 2020). In response to this situation, establishments and authorities encouraged the implementation of biosecurity protocols, focusing on increased cleanliness of restaurants and the use of digital tools such as contactless payments or the use of digital menus (Gursoy & Chi, 2021).

From an academic perspective, this new situation has also begun to be studied under the concept of Cleanliness (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Gursoy & Chi, 2020). In this sense, the present study seeks to contribute to the knowledge of this still little-studied variable and at the same time relate it to other extremely important variables in the catering sector, such as Brand Equity, Brand Experience, Consumer Well-Being and Customer Satisfaction.

With regard to Brand Experience, previous research has found that restaurant customers associate it with food quality, interaction and price equity (Ali et al., 2016; Jin et al., 2012; Ong et al., 2018), which can influence a future visit (Mohamed & Musa, 2012) and generate a sense of affection and commitment to a brand (Brakus et al., 2009).

Likewise, in the restaurant sector, another widely studied variable is Customer Satisfaction. In this regard, previous research has shown its relationship with service quality, customer perceived value and satisfaction (Ryu et al., 2012; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000), as well as with overall restaurant image, perceived value and behavioural intentions in restaurants (Ryu et al., 2012).

Finally, this study aims to incorporate a variable that has been little-explored so far in the restaurant sector, but of great importance: Consumer Well-Being, as it plays an important role in the decision-making process (Lee et al., 2002), and it can be associated with the selection of a restaurant if it is able to be perceived as an exclusive place that provides a good experience and also has a positive impact on the quality of life of consumers (Kim et al., 2012; Sirgy et al., 2007).

As a result of the theoretical gaps proposed above, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that Cleanliness and Brand Equity in the restaurant sector have a positive influence on Customer Well-Being, which at the same time

influences Customer Satisfaction, and at the same time to check whether Cleanliness influences Brand Experience and Brand Experience influences Customer Satisfaction.

2. Revision of the literature

2.1 Brand Equity (BEQ)

Brand Equity (BEQ) came to prominence in the 1980s when a large number of mergers and acquisitions between companies took place (Leone et al., 2006; Agarwal & Rao, 1996) and BEQ was found to generate higher growth and higher margins for products, by allowing higher prices to be charged and reducing reliance on promotions (Aaker, 1992). At the academic level, Aaker (1992) defined BEQ as the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand name and logo, which brings value to both the company and customers.

Regarding its measurement, Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) developed multivariate measurement scales. Aaker (1991) identified that BEQ is measured through four dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand perception and brand quality; while Keller (1993) concluded that BEQ could be measured through two dimensions: brand image and brand awareness.

2.2 Cleanliness (CLL)

Goodman (1979) identified that cleanliness is the most important element in the catering sector, as it influences customer service satisfaction (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010). In this sense, Cleanliness can be defined as the variable that assesses the cleanliness and hygiene of different elements where food is served, such as the dining room, tables, kitchen, bathroom (Barber et al., 2011), staff, (Aksoydan, 2007), the environment of the establishment (Johnston, 1995) and all tangible objects related to the service (Brown et al., 1991; Park et al., 2016).

Regarding its study, even if only partially, previous literature has shown that in the restaurant sector, the general cleanliness of the dining area (Park, 2004), the appearance of the employees (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Ryu & Shawn Jang, 2008; Stevens et al., 1995), the conditions in the kitchen (Pettijohn et al., 1997) are important dimensions for restaurant users, since if they do not meet the expected standards of hygiene and cleanliness, they will be labelled as low or poor quality services (Aksoydan, 2007; Zeithaml et al., 1990).

2.3 Brand Experience (BE)

Today, customers are no longer only looking for tangible benefits, but also for intangible benefits, such as unique shopping experiences (Morrison & Crane, 2007; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010), so it is known that brands that provide consumers with long-lasting experiences that endure over time, will improve the satisfaction and loyalty of their customers (Oliver et al., 1997; Reichheld, 1996).

Within the restaurant sector, brand experience is crucial for consumers and is directly related to the future decision to return to the same establishment (Mohamed & Musa, 2012), the recommendation of the establishment or the generation of word of mouth (Schmitt et al., 2015). Cleanliness is also known to be a variable that can influence the quality of the service received and the customer experience (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Bienstock et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2017; Lockyer, 2003). Therefore, it is proposed that there may also be a relationship between Cleanliness and the Brand Experience in the restaurant sector and the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Cleanliness influences the Brand Experience in the restaurant sector.

2.4 Consumer Well-being (CWB)

While Consumer Well-being (CWB) is sometimes confused with customer satisfaction (Kim et al., 2012), in reality Consumer Well-being is conceived as a consumer's positive emotional response to a high quality good or service (Lee et al., 2002; Sirgy et al., 2007) and is manifested in the satisfaction of a consumer's desires in various material, social, emotional, and physical aspects of their life (Suranyi-Unger, Jr., 1981).

In relation to the antecedents of CWB, it is known that as the level of satisfaction with various aspects of life increases, so does the level of CWB (Dagger & Sweeney, 2006; Lee et al., 2002). Furthermore, while the existence of the relationship between CWB with constructs such as behavioural intentions, brand attitude, and customer

satisfaction has been verified in previous literature, the same is not true for some of the variables in the present study such as BEQ or CLL. Despite the lack of previous literature on the study of these relationships, it can be assumed that they could exist, since the relationship between CLL and Brand Equity with Consumer Well-being should be very relevant variables for the restaurant customer. For this reason, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H2: Cleanliness influences Consumer Well-being in the restaurant sector.

H3: Brand Equity influences Consumer Well-being in the restaurant sector.

2.5 Customer Satisfaction (CS)

Satisfaction began to emerge as an important topic in consumer research in the late 1970s (Ainsworth, 1980; Andreasen, 1977; Czeplé & Rosenberg, 1977), with Andreasen being one of the first authors to study the variable (1977), defining it as the extent to which consumers' needs and wants are satisfied, associated with the reward obtained (Ainsworth, 1980) from experiences associated with a service (Anderson et al., 1994; Oliver et al., 1997).

In the restaurant sector, the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction have been extensively studied and service quality (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000), customer perceived value or repurchase intention (Ryu et al., 2012) have been identified as determining factors in customer satisfaction. It has also been corroborated that Customer Well-Being has an impact on customer satisfaction through their purchase and contributes to the customer's life (Sirgy et al., 2007). It has also been shown that within the restaurant sector, BE is a determining factor in achieving CS (Hussein, 2018; Nam et al., 2011). As such, it is expected that such relationships also exist in the catering sector and the following hypotheses are put forward.

H4: Brand Experience influences Customer Satisfaction in the restaurant sector.

H5: Customer Well-Being influences Customer Satisfaction in the restaurant sector.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection and sampling

The data were collected through an online survey, using a digital questionnaire as the main tool, because it allows access to a large number of people more quickly, allows a wide range of questions to be asked and easily answered, and facilitates processing at a low cost (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Wright, 2005). The study population consisted of people who have eaten in restaurants on the premises in Peru during the last six months of the year 2021. The sample for the present study was 607 people, of whom only 416 answered all the questions correctly. The sampling was non-probabilistic.

To obtain information on the variables, an instrument was constructed using scales from the previously studied literature. These scales were initially written in English, so they were adapted and translated into Spanish in order to be used within the study population. The items used within the questionnaire were measured using Likert scales from 1 to 5.

Hussein's (2018) scale to measure Brand Experience (BE), was adapted. Also, Hyun's 2009 multi-dimensional scale was adapted to measure Brand Equity (BEQ). For Cleanliness, the scale of Park et al. (2016) was adapted. Henson & Roberts (2006), Ungku Fatimah et al (2011), Worsfold (2006). The Jin et al. (2012) scale was used to measure Customer Satisfaction, which was adapted from the one formulated by Fornell & Larcker, (1981). Finally, the scale of I. Kim et al (2012) previously used by Anderson & Gerbing (1988), Fornell & Larcker (1981) was adapted to measure Customer Well-Being.

To answer the hypotheses, a PLS-SEM analysis was performed using the SmartPLS 3 tool (Sarstedt et al., 2017) as it is a popular method for estimating relationships between variables within complex models. Furthermore, PLS-SEM models are recognised for their large statistical power and comprehensive analysis of results.

3.2 Results

The results of the present study and the hypothesis testing were evaluated through a PLS-SEM model. This process comprised two stages, the first examined the reflexive model and the second continued with the evaluation of the structural model (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

First, composite reliability and reliability for internal consistency of the constructs were assessed. The results obtained were greater than 0.70, indicating a high level of reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2017). The results for Cronbach's alpha, rho_A and pc were also higher than 0.7 and therefore satisfactory (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

The next step to validate reliability was to analyse the average variance extracted (AVE) across all items associated with a single construct. After analysing the results obtained, Brand Experience (BE), Brand Equity (BEQ), Cleanliness (CLL) and Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Consumer Well-Being (CWB) all showed scores above 0.5 (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Subsequently, discriminant validity was assessed using the Henseler et al. (2015) heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation test. Within the present study, it was determined that all variables were below the 0.90 threshold .

After reaffirming that the measurement model is of satisfactory quality, the structural evaluation was carried out. First of all, it was verified that there were no collinearity problems between the variables, and then the evaluation focused on understanding the predictive model in detail. For this purpose, the VIF was used, resulting in values lower than 5, as proposed in previous literature (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Next, the R2 values were evaluated, taking into account that the closer its value is to 1, the higher is its predictive accuracy (Sarstedt et al., 2017). The results showed values of 0.540 for Brand Experience (BE), 0.698 for Customer Satisfaction (CS) and 0.750 for Consumer Well-being (CWB), being a medium intensity in the case of BE and CE and high in the case of CWB.

Hypothesis testing was then performed by bootstrapping 5,000 samples. Regarding H1 (CLL-BE), the results allowed the acceptance of this hypothesis with a path coefficient of 0.74. The H2 (CLL - CWB) was also reaffirmed and its path coefficient was 0.75. Likewise, H3 (BEQ-CWB) was accepted although its significance level was 0.019 and a path coefficient of 0.19, the lowest of all. Finally, both H4 (BE-CS) and H5 (CWB-CS) were tested, with the former achieving a path coefficient of 0.45 and the latter a path coefficient of 0.63.

To conclude the analysis, the results of f2 were analysed, for which values of 0.02 were obtained between BEQ - CWB and 0.09 for BE - CS, which represents a small effect. In the case of CLL - CWB and CWB - CS, the values were 0.43 and 0.52 respectively, and therefore their effects were average (Cohen, 1988) (see table 6). Finally, the predictive capacity of the model was evaluated through Q². The results in table 7 show that the Q² values were 0.38 for BE, 0.7 for CS and 0.62 for CWB.

4. Discussion

The results of this study present a series of relevant contributions to the study of the Cleanliness and Customer Well Being variables in the restaurant sector. Although the Cleanliness variable has gained much relevance in recent times, knowledge about it is still scarce, which is why this study aimed to contribute to its understanding and prove the existence of a relationship between it and Consumer Well-being, thus covering some of the theoretical gaps in the discipline of study. As expected, the results made it possible to prove the existence of such relationships, even more so in the context in which the study was carried out, where cleanliness and biosecurity protocols have become more relevant within the restaurant sector (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Gursoy & Chi, 2020), and it can be affirmed that Cleanliness is key to achieving Customer Well-being.

Secondly, the relationship between Brand Equity and Consumer Well-being was also verified, which reaffirms the idea that Customer Well-being is related to more variables than satisfaction or loyalty (Dagger & Sweeney, 2006; Lee et al., 2002), and reinforces the importance of Brand Equity within the restaurant sector, which is undoubtedly a significant contribution to this discipline. Thirdly, the existence of a relationship between Cleanliness and the Brand Experience within the sector studied was also corroborated, which reinforces the contributions of Aksoydan (2007); Zeithaml et al. (1990); and Barber and Scarcelli, (2010), who had found that Cleanliness, along with food quality and value, is considered a critical component that influences customers'

evaluation of the perceived in-store experience (Sirgy et al., 2007). Moreover, the results were verified that within the restaurant sector, BE is a determining factor in achieving CS (Hussein, 2018; Nam et al., 2011).

In addition, Cleanliness is a current topic in the sector, because consumers have high expectations, perceive and evaluate the appropriate appearance of the restaurant, that is why managers and owners must focus on the cleanliness of the environment (Kim & Bachman, 2019). Finally, there are various restaurant elements that also affect consumer satisfaction like the waiting time, service and food quality, and ambience of the facilities (Gupta et al., 2007).

4.1 Limitations and future studies

This study has some limitations. In this regard, it should be noted that the data were collected only in Peru, so it is recommended to expand the study population to other geographical contexts in Latin America, or other realities such as the United States, Europe or Asia.

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