



Brand loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth antecedents: the moderating effects of experiences

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3 **Brand loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth antecedents: the**
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6 **moderating effects of experiences**
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10 **Abstract**
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13 **Purpose** - This paper aims to analyse brand loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth
14 (eWOM) antecedents in restaurants: (i) utilitarian and hedonic benefits (ii) brand
15 satisfaction and (iii) brand love. It also provides valuable knowledge through the
16 comparison between positive and negative restaurant experiences.
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21 **Design/methodology/approach** – A survey was carried out of restaurant satisfied
22 and dissatisfied consumers. Structural equation modelling (SEM) and multi-group
23 analysis were performed to examine the cause-and-effect relationship in both
24 groups.
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29 **Findings** – The results show the relevance of benefits, brand satisfaction and brand
30 love as causes for brand loyalty and e-WOM. Also, the relationships are
31 significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.
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35 **Originality/value** - The outcome of the research provides new insights to develop
36 a conceptual S-O-R model of consumers’ restaurant behavior by drawing
37 comparisons across satisfied and dissatisfied ones.
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41 **Keywords** Benefits, Brand Satisfaction, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty, eWOM
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44 **Paper type** Research paper
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50 **Introduction**
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53 The restaurant industry is a promising sector, confirming that food is a basic need (Zanetta
54 et al., 2024). According to the results of the Household Budget Survey (2023) (INE,
55 2024), households spent 3,311 euros in restaurants and hotels, 386 euros more than in
56 2022. This reflects the importance of the sector, as does the number of restaurants, which,
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according to the UVE Data Market Horeca 2024 in Spain (UVE, 2024), amount to 104,745 establishments (3.8% more than in 2023). However, restaurant is a complex sector because the relationship between services and customers (Zanetta et al., 2024). Therefore, bearing in mind the collective viewpoints of Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this research study tries to understand stimulus and internal state to achieve higher loyalty and positive eWOM as behavioural responses of restaurant consumers.

Loyalty is an expression of a favourable attitude towards the brand that produces a more intense purchase intention in customers (Song et al., 2019). Cultivating the brand loyalty attained principal importance as far as the service sector is concerned, especially where service providers render services with minor distinctions and fight in complex environment, particularly in the restaurant sector (Javer et al, 2021).

Rahman and Mannan (2018, p. 407) define eWOM as “any statement made by the actual, potential or former customers about products available to a large number of consumers and institutions via internet technology”. Anonymity implicit in eWOM (Siqueira *et al.*, 2019) increases the possibility of openly offering clear transparent opinions (Ardyan *et al.*, 2018). In the age of technology, eWOM plays a key role in the exchange of consumers’ opinions on a brand (Yalcinkaya and Just, 2023), with a much greater impact than traditional WOM (Siqueira *et al.*, 2019). For many consumers, eWOM is the source that offers clear, transparent and open information (Ardyan *et al.*, 2018).

Improving loyalty and positive eWOM is a challenge for restaurants managers. Despite the various factors can influence consumers’ decisions making processes, two stimulus (utilitarian and hedonic benefits) and two organism or internal state (satisfaction and love) have been identified by other studies. Thus, Faruq *et al.*, (2023) examined the impact of

hedonic and utilitarian benefits to improve behavioural intentions and consumer satisfaction on a restaurant. Satisfaction is related to customers' evaluation of how effectively the product and its attributes have fulfilled their needs and wants (Byun and Jang, 2019) because customers feel satisfied when the function of a product or a service meets their expectations (Shen *et al.*, 2021). Without satisfaction, the individual will not repeat their behaviour or make positive recommendations (To and Leung, 2023). Satisfaction has been defined by Song *et al.*, (2019, p. 51) as "a psychological notion about a consumer's emotional evaluation of or the pleasurable degree of the experience associated with specific products or services". It has been described as a direct consequence of having experienced an outstanding brand (Oliveira Sanntini *et al.*, 2018). Another factor, and perhaps less researched than others, is brand love, as the final aim of the commercial strategy (Robertson *et al.*, 2022). Thus, feedback, as a sign of involvement with the brand, is what differentiates clients who love the brand from others that do not (Garg *et al.*, 2015). Brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Garg *et al.*, 2015) is generated as a voluntary response when a specific service becomes irreplaceable. A feeling as intense as brand love is the objective of all brands, particularly in the catering industry (Karjaluo *et al.*, 2016).

However, and despite numerous investigations in the field, the antecedents of loyalty and eWOM still requires further analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Saydam and Altun, 2023). The main aim of this study is to bridge this research gap by analysing and comparing positive and negative experience in a restaurant.

This study adds value to three important areas. Firstly, it determines key aspects influencing loyalty and eWOM in the scope of restaurant services (Presi *et al.*, 2014; Yalcinkaya and Just, 2023).

Secondly, it provides a comparison between positive and negative experiences, that is, between satisfied and dissatisfied customers. Thus, an approach focusing on the issuer of the message rather than the receiver, which has been the case so far, is adopted (Sweeney *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, although several studies provide evidence of the effects of positive comments vs. negative ones (Martin, 2017; Sweeney *et al.*, 2012), there has been little analysis of the process triggering a negative experience vs. a positive one with regard to the expression of positive judgements vs. negative ones.

Thirdly, a more detailed examination of the consumer behaviour in the restaurant sector is carried out, the analysis of which has become a key aspect and more so if its impact on brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty or eWOM are studied (Oliveira Sanntini *et al.*, 2018).

Literature review

Utilitarian and hedonic benefits: brand satisfaction antecedents in a restaurant experience

Tourism services providers are interested in understanding the attitudes and behaviours of their users. Specifically, a recent study concluded that many hedonic and utilitarian aspects can significantly affect be satisfied with a restaurant (Zanetta *et al.*, 2024). Parsa *et al.*, (2020) proposed hedonic and utilitarian concept is not a bimodal system but a continuum raging from high utilitarian to high hedonic. On this continuum, a restaurant's position can vary based on the type of dining experiences it provides, whether they are utilitarian or hedonic, and the proportion of each. However, following the dichotomous approach defended by Chitturi *et al.*, (2008, p. 48), products that meet or exceed customers' utilitarian needs and fulfill prevention goals enhance customer satisfaction, and products that meet or exceed customers' hedonic wants and fulfill promotion goals

enhance customer delight. Similarly, by incorporating the Hlee *et al.*, (2019, p. 195) perspective, users seem to evaluate the experience in a restaurant based on utilitarian benefits (such as value, price or location) and hedonic benefits (such as elegant waiting staff, fancy cutlery, aroma of excellent wine, and outstanding/extraordinary meals). As they remark, in marketing research, the dichotomization of hedonic and utilitarian benefits has been demonstrated from various behavioural patterns and buying decisions. Recently, Ponsignon *et al.*, (2024) documented the existence of a predominantly utilitarian and a predominantly hedonic model, articulating why and how consumers pursue distinctly different types of consumer journeys. In the sphere of social networks, both kind of attributes in a restaurant are also coined “useful” (utilitarian benefits) and “fun” (hedonic). Hlee *et al.*, (2019, p. 195) demonstrated using a sample of 2629 online reviews (1323 reviews for three casual restaurants and 1306 reviews for three luxury restaurants), that two kinds of cues help to explain the final satisfaction with a restaurant experience: functional and hedonic. In their study, it seems that utilitarian evaluations were greater for a casual restaurant than for a luxury restaurant.

This dichotomy of benefits in a restaurant experience was also probed in the study by Muñoz-Leiva and Gómez-Carmona (2019) using the functional magnetic resonance image (fMRI) methodology. As they demonstrated, well-presented dishes activate areas in the brain connected to the network of emotions. Thus, visualization of restaurant menus is not purely cognitive (functional) but recalls a strong affective component (hedonic). These results corroborate that aesthetics and emotional benefits are also important when experiencing a restaurant.

According to Mehrabian and Russell, (1974), Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model accentuates that improvement in the assessment of internal procedure of the organism is elicited by a stimulus that influences the response. Referring to this, utilitarian

and hedonic benefits that the service can provide act as impetus and are capable of influencing customers' satisfaction.

Similar to the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), if functional benefits augment, users' satisfaction augments also; and the same occurs for hedonic benefits. So, the following hypotheses could be stated:

H1: Utilitarian benefits will explain users' brand satisfaction.

H2: Hedonic benefits will explain users' brand satisfaction.

Effects of brand satisfaction

As Kim *et al.*, (2020) state, customers' satisfaction is a key aspect to retain and increase customers. In this sense, literature has concluded that higher levels of satisfaction cause higher levels of loyalty (Shen *et al.*, 2021). Not in vain, diverse studies in various contexts indeed repeatedly identified a significant linkage between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Fatmawati and Amanati, 2023; Ferreira *et al.*, 2019; Moliner-Velázquez *et al.*, 2019, Rodríguez-López, *et al.*, 2023; Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2021). And this is especially relevant in the increasingly global hospitality market, where customer satisfaction is the final objective for many hotel and restaurant companies (Byun and Jang, 2019; Zanetta *et al.*, 2024). For example, Javed *et al.*, (2021) examined the effect of satisfaction on the loyalty of quick-meal restaurant customers. Shen *et al.*, (2021) based on data collected from 350 guests at casual dining restaurants, concluded that customer satisfaction impacts on loyalty. More recently, Cankül *et al.*, (2024) analysed the responses of 489 customers visiting Tourism Business Certified restaurants in Turkey and concluded that customer satisfaction was a crucial prerequisite for customer loyalty.

Considering previous lines and in the light of S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this paper proposes the positive impact of customer satisfaction (internal evaluation) on brand loyalty (external response):

H3: Brand satisfaction increases brand loyalty.

Another expected effect of satisfaction is brand love. Compared to satisfaction, brand love is an affective sentiment, and not a cognitive one (Bigne *et al.*, 2020). In the tourism industry, people may love places, restaurants, hotels, theme parks or airlines companies. In all cases, a feeling of passion emerges, which explains future behaviours. Thus, the concept of brand love is becoming increasingly important in tourism and hospitality because only satisfying customers is not enough to retain loyalty as satisfied customers still can choose another brand (Shen *et al.*, 2021). In the light of this situation, brand love is demonstrated in some studies as a positive indicator of customer satisfaction with a restaurant (Zanetta *et al.*, 2024). This complex construct includes affect, passion, attachment, positive evaluation, positive emotions, and declarations of love for the brand (Osorio *et al.*, 2023 p.2).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) point out that when a customer is satisfied with a product/service, they will associate positive impressions with the brand and develop emotional bonds. In this line, Sallam and Wahid (2015) state that previous studies have considered the effect of customer satisfaction on brand love. They point out that, although diverse studies analyse the relationship between satisfaction and brand love, only a few studies propose the effect of the relationship, i.e., the effect of satisfaction on brand love. For example, studies by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Kim *et al.*, (2021) found a positive effect of brand satisfaction on brand love.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) further supports this linkage by suggesting that attitudes (such as satisfaction) influence behavioural intentions

and affective responses (such as brand love). Therefore, this paper proposes that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on brand love.

H4: Brand satisfaction increases brand love.

Effects of brand love

As stated before, brand love is gaining prominence in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The explanation can be found in the fact that brand love produces greater commitment to a brand and customers will repurchase a product or service even if alternatives are offered (Osorio *et al.*, 2023; Shen *et al.*, 2021). This strong emotional bond results in a brand being respected, recognised and remembered (Song *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, Zanetta *et al.*, (2024) confirmed the model proposed by Carrol and Ahuvia (2006), brand love appears as a key variable that affects brand loyalty (Robertson *et al.*, 2022) and word-of-mouth (Trivedi and Sama, 2021).

In the retail context, Ferreira *et al.*, (2019) found that brand love influences customer loyalty and contributed to the need to understand the satisfaction-loyalty relation involving other variables as predictors. In the field of tourism destinations, brand love towards the destination was found to develop positive outcomes such as revisit intention (Amaro *et al.*, 2020). In the same vein, Bigne *et al.*, (2020) concluded that brand love, related to emotions, explains purchase intentions. As these authors indicate “while the importance of brand love is evident in consumer behaviour, this affective factor has been seldom discussed in the tourism industry” (p.1616), so future research is needed to demonstrate this connection. In summary, brand love (towards a restaurant, a destination, a hotel, etc.) and loyalty seem to be related concepts. For example, in the luxury hotels sector, Kang (2018) found that when consumers love a brand, they are more willing to repurchase. Sikandar and Ahmed (2019) analyzed the impact of brand love on promoting

brand loyalty towards restaurants in Pakistan based on 303 opinions. As they explain, restaurants need to establish brand love to draw in more purchasers. Similarly, Kim *et al.*, (2021) concluded that brand love has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty based on the data collected from 404 customers who had visited a robot barista coffee shop in South Korea.

Considering the above and consistent with the S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this paper points out the possible positive effect of brand love (internal state) on brand loyalty (behaviour intention):

H5: Brand love increases brand loyalty.

Together with brand loyalty, eWOM is possibly the other main effect of brand love. Recently, Liao *et al.*, (2024) explain how consumer implicit endorsement “I love it” in tourism products is more persuasive when sharing positive eWOM. Specifically, the article conducts their analysis across different sources (anonymous reviewers, friends, influencers), channels (online community, social commerce platform, social networking app), and products (hotels, restaurants). As Kang (2018) states, brand love promotes consumers to share information about the brand and make favourable comments. Because brand love can lead to the committed relationship between customers and a brand (Tsai, 2014), customers recommend their beloved brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Bigne *et al.*, (2020) state that brand love “leads to passion-driven behaviours” (p.1616) such as positive comments through social networks. Compared to satisfaction (which is mainly related to transactions), the authors indicate how brand love “develops over time and is more related to a long-term brand relationship”, and social networks represent an easy way to establish and maintain this relationship.

Using a sample of 5,511 international students from the Erasmus program of the European Union, Amaro *et al.*, (2020) verified that destination brand love had a significant impact

on eWOM because consumers are committed to spreading their positive opinion and to convincing others to engage with that brand. As they recommend, tools such as social media, retargeting and Google ads can be used as a way of reminding ex-visitors to return to visit the loved destination. This effect has also been studied in the context of hotels, wine and coffee shops and restaurants. For example, Sallam and Wahid (2015) found that brand love influences restaurant recommendations. Similarly, Shen *et al.*, (2021) demonstrated the positive effect of brand love on word-of-mouth in the context of casual dining restaurants in four main cities in China.

In line with the above-mentioned and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this study proposes that brand love has a positive effect on eWOM:

H6: Brand love increases positive eWOM.

Moderation role of *experience*: positive versus negative customers

Restaurants need to deliver a memorable experience to make consumers happy. However, very often, diners do not enjoy the experience for one reason or another, becoming disappointed customers with low rates of loyalty and brand love, and consequently encouraging negative comments online.

For more holistic view, “identifying satisfied and dissatisfied customers has been an important research theme among scholars from various disciplines including engineering, management, marketing, and hospitality” (Bilgihan *et al.*, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, the following lines will try to show how both targets (positive and negative clients) do not behave equally, bearing in mind the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) and as previous literature has demonstrated (Baier *et al.*, 2020; Lages *et al.*, 2023; Liao *et al.*, 2024).

Satisfaction effects: positive versus negative clients

Regarding brand satisfaction effects, Baier *et al.*, (2020) explain how, since the 1980s, both academia and industry, have investigated this point. Their work, based on encounter data corresponding to 1,584 IT incidents in a real-world service, demonstrates that satisfaction effects are not the same according to the degree of satisfaction. Time-related features, such as the overall incident duration or the time elapsed until the provider reaches out to the customer for the first time, are important drivers of dissatisfaction. Therefore, if we accept that satisfaction relates to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience, higher disconfirmed clients will react more strongly (significantly less loyalty and brand love) than the more satisfied ones. That is, the effects of satisfaction on brand love and brand loyalty will be amplified with negative clients.

In the same vein, Berezina *et al.*, (2016) have compared satisfied and dissatisfied clients for a tourism service, based on online reviews by 2,510 hotel guests, concluding that satisfaction effects are not the same between both targets (positive and negative clients). As these authors explain, dissatisfaction may lead to negative brand attitudes (brand love) and lessen the likelihood of buying the same brand again (brand loyalty). Compared to satisfied positive customers, the adverse effects of negativity are greater. The reason for this is that negativity is weighted more heavily in the decision-making process than positive information.

Therefore, and following previous comments, the next two hypotheses are:

H3b: The relationship between **brand satisfaction** and **brand loyalty** will be significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.

H4b: The relationship between **brand satisfaction** and **brand love** will be significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.

Brand love effects: positive versus negative clients

On the one hand, the effects of brand love related to loyalty also seem to be stronger in the negative arena than in the positive one. For example, work done by Edwards and Meiselman (2005) for restaurants concludes that only negative statements made by personnel influence food choice. That is, the power of negativity to curb future purchases is stronger than the power of positivity to encourage future purchases. So, a disappointed client will never repeat the experience in that restaurant, while a customer who is in love with the brand may or may not repeat. Thus, the force of negativity is stronger.

On the other hand, the effect of brand love on eWOM will also be stronger among disappointed consumers. As authors such as Zhang *et al.*, (2018) or Amaro *et al.*, (2020) have defend, dissatisfied consumers tend to engage more in WOM than satisfied ones. Also, the review by Litvin *et al.*, (2008) demonstrated the influence of both positive and negative WOM upon tourism products in diverse countries, and among different types of tourists. With the arrival of new technologies, eWOM has largely replaced WOM, because potential tourists search for quicker and more detailed information in the digital space. In this electronic world, a single negative comment about a brand from a disappointed customer can be enough to break brand love among consumers leading them to join in the generation of negative content.

In summary, when brand love is damaged, the effects on brand loyalty and eWOM will be stronger than when brand love is long-established.

H5b: The relationship between **brand love** and **brand loyalty** will be significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.

H6b: The relationship between **brand love** and **eWOM** will be significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.

The current research employed three theories as a theoretical foundation, which provides a base for hypotheses: S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory and TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Capitalizing on these theories and the literature review, this study proposed the theoretical model shown in Figure 1.

-----[FIGURE 1]-----

Methodology

Population and sample

A non-probabilistic sampling method and the snowball technique were used to obtain respondents. The study was performed using a Web-based survey. Specifically, the questionnaire was disseminated by e-mail and WhatsApp. Diverse links were published also on social media. A context was used to increase participation. The winner of the draw received a coupon for dinner for two at a restaurant in León. Data were collected from the 8th of February till the 16th of February 2020. Responses that did not follow some of the following conditions were removed from the final analysed database: enough time to fill in the survey; incoherence in the control questions; and very “mechanical” responses in the scales.

In the introduction of the questionnaire, respondents were driven to the scenario of a personal bad and good experience at a restaurant. More accurate and descriptive answers can be obtained by making the interviewees remember those experiences and answer the questions bearing them in mind. Therefore, in the questionnaire, the sample was asked a section of questions about a positive experience at a restaurant and the same section of questions referring to a negative experience.

Initial data collected were subjected to screening through data cleaning and validation processes to ensure data integrity for research purposes. As a result, the final sample consisted of 325 respondents.

Measurement instrument

The questionnaire was divided into two parts corresponding to a positive and a negative experience at a restaurant, respectively. In both parts the first question (with 6 items) referred to the experience, replicating Brakus *et al.*, (2009). Following, brand loyalty was analysed implementing 5 items (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The third question covered the items proposed by Carroll and Ahuiva (2006) for the eWOM effect, followed by the analyses of brand satisfaction (To and Leung, 2023) and brand love (Carroll and Ahuiva, 2006). To conclude, the hedonic and functional benefits of the experience were considered, following 11 statements by Babin and Mitch (1998).

Data analysis

The study applied a quantitative method. A combination of structural equation modeling (SEM) and multi-group analysis (MGA) was applied to assess the measurement and structural models, and contrast hypotheses. The reason for adopting this approach was because the predictive power of two independent factors (utilitarian benefits and hedonic benefits) over four dependent factors (brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty and eWOM) was examined in this study.

In summary, the casual procedures (relations) in the study are characterized by a sequence of interacting structural equations (regressions) calculated together (Byrne, 2013). More specifically, this model is described by two structural equations that will be calculated conjointly, in a general model using EQS software (version 6.2). This multivariate

method is suggested when a subjacent latent variable structure occurs, which connects the identical concepts in different regressions.

Results

Respondents' information

A sample of 325 answers were received from Spanish people, with a quite homogeneous distribution along the North, South, East and West of the country. From this sample, 648 restaurant experiences were collected (325 positive and 323 negative). Females represented 68% of the total interviewees. The distribution among the diverse age ranges was: 47.1% between 16 and 24 years and 22.2% between 45 and 54 years, with 63.7% of them having university studies. Regarding income, the sample was equally distributed among medium-high (42.2%) and medium-low income (42.5%) income levels (see Table 1).

-----[TABLE 1]-----

Measurement validation

The psychometric characteristics of each scale (factor) utilized were analyzed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using EQS software. In particular:

- **Reliability** is utilized to evidence the internal consistency of all the scales employed to measure every factor (concept) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For this reason, three reliability indicators were analyzed for each scale: (i) Cronbach's alpha (α); (ii) composed reliability index (CR) and (iii) average extracted variance (AVE). The results demonstrate that for all scales, Cronbach's alpha values were higher than 0.9, as suggested. CR values were also higher than 0.8, and the values for AVE surpassed the

minimum necessary value (0.5) (Table 2). These high values validate the reliability of the scales.

- **Convergent validity** enabled us to show that the concepts (factors) of the model were measured through the adequate items. First, all items with factor loadings are higher than 0.5 to guarantee that were well-represented, contributing to the model's convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Second, it was confirmed that each factor load was significant ($t > 2.56$). Third, the overall goodness-of-fit measurements for the model are GFI=0.80; Incremental Fit: 0.97; AGFI=0.80; NFI=0.96; NNFI=0.96; CFI Robust=0.97 RMSEA=0.07; SRMR=0.03. Thus, the model fit for the pooled sample is confirmed.
- **Discriminant validity** showed that each concept in our model was adequate for measuring different things. Therefore, it was verified that each factor expressed significantly different concepts (Table 3).

In summary, Tables 2 and 3 verify the reliability of each scale as well as convergent validity.

-----[TABLE 2]-----

-----[TABLE 3]-----

Structural model

A structural equation model (SEM) was implemented to contrast our hypotheses. The overall goodness-of-fit statistics showed GFI=0.80; NFI=0.93; NNFI=0.93; CFI=0.94; IFI=0.94, around the ideal value of 0.9. RMSEA=0.09 and SRMR=0.1, indicating a moderate fit. However, these values still fall within an acceptable range for complex models (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1993) (see Table 4). At the same time, average error

between the observed matrix and the reproduced matrix is suitable (Bollen, 1989). The results show that all the hypotheses have been supported.

Thus, the analysis shows, firstly, that two independent factors (utilitarian and hedonic benefits) may contribute to predicting brand satisfaction. Figure 2 depicts the standardised path coefficients between constructs. Specifically:

- The relationship between **benefits** with a restaurant experience (**utilitarian H1a and hedonic H2a**) and brand satisfaction has been demonstrated (H1: $\beta=0.414$, $p<0.05$; H2: $\beta=0.868$, $p<0.05$). So, H1a and H2a were confirmed.
- More brand satisfaction increases brand loyalty (H3a: $\beta=0.672$, $p<0.05$) and brand love (H4a: $\beta=0.914$, $p<0.05$). So, **H3a** and **H4a** should be accepted.
- Finally, and related to the effects of brand love, our results show that brand love increases user brand loyalty (**H5a**) and their positive eWOM (**H6a**) ($\beta=0.282$, $p<0.05$ and $\beta=0.553$, $p<0.05$, respectively), also accepting both hypotheses.

-----[FIGURE 2]-----

-----[TABLE 4]-----

Positive versus negative experience

To study the moderating role of experience in a restaurant, we implemented two estimations: the first for the group of 325 positive experiences and the second for the group of 323 negative ones. Fit indices showed moderated fits to the data (GFI=0.80; RMSEA=0.090; SRMR=0.094; AGFI=0.80; NFI=0.85; NNFI=0.87; CFI Robust=0.80). Though the fit is not perfect, it may still be acceptable for assessing the hypothesized

relationships, especially with a complex model. Thus, the conceptual model can be accepted for assessing the hypothesized relationships, as shown in Figure 3.

Following Jaccard and Wan (1996), two phases were required. First, for both sub-groups (positive and negative experiences), the parameters and significance of hypotheses were estimated. The model was consequently able to describe the suggested relationships in each scenario. As Table 5 shows, the same hypotheses are accepted for both sub-groups, validating the moderation role of experience.

Second, the Lagrange multiplier test (Lmtest) was utilized to analyze whether significant differences between the parameters in each sub-group exist. When comparing two different experiences (positive versus negative), no differences were observed regarding the relationship proposed in the model, except between brand satisfaction and brand love.

In the compared analysis all hypotheses were confirmed. Specifically:

- The relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty is significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.431 < \beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.466$, $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 2.031$). So, **H3b** can be supported.

The relationship between brand satisfaction and brand love is significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.773 < \beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.905$, $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 4.165$). Therefore, **H4b** should be accepted.

- The relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.435 > \beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.401$, $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 0.444$). Thus, **H5b** could be supported.

- Finally, the relationship between brand love and eWOM is significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.452 < \beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.745$, $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 0.384$). As a result, **H6b** was also acceptable.

-----[FIGURE 3]-----

-----[TABLE 5]-----

Discussion

This research has focused on brand loyalty and eWOM antecedents and compares positive and negative brand experiences (regarding restaurant sector). Specifically, these experiences moderated the proposed model. So, following Siqueira *et al.*, (2019), eWOM plays more impact than WOM for consumers because it offered more valuable information and confidentiality.

Regarding eWOM, previous studies have shown important aspects influencing it in restaurant services (Presi *et al.*, 2014). In this sense, and as these previous studies concur, eWOM has been influenced specially by brand love.

Regarding positive and negative brand experiences, previous studies showed effects of positive comments vs. negative ones (Martin, 2017; Sweeney *et al.*, 2012). However, more research is needed on how an experience influences the expression of judgements. In this sense, our study provides knowledge through a comparison between satisfied and dissatisfied customers.

Finally, following Oliveira Sanntini *et al.*, (2018), our study supports empirically the impact of brand experience on brand loyalty, satisfaction, brand love or eWOM.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretical implications

This paper makes important theoretical contributions than become interesting implications for academics. This research analyzes the antecedents of brand loyalty and eWOM. At the same time, it compares positive and negative restaurant experiences.

The present paper enables two main contributions to be highlighted. First, this research proposes a theoretical model that explains the influence of the utilitarian and the hedonic benefits on brand satisfaction. This proposed model aligning with established theories such as Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

Second, the study adds to the current literature by shedding light on the impact of benefits, brand satisfaction and brand love as significant antecedents of brand loyalty and eWOM.

Thereby, previous research has shown that: firstly, benefits are antecedents of brand satisfaction (Hlee *et al.*, 2019). Secondly, brand satisfaction is antecedent of brand loyalty (Shen *et al.*, 2021) and brand love (Sallam and Wahid, 2015). And finally, brand love is antecedent of brand loyalty (Sikandar and Ahmed, 2019) and eWOM (Amaro *et al.*, 2020).

Third, the research contributes to the extant literature on satisfied versus dissatisfied customers. The relationships between the concepts are significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones. This line follows the most recent complementary approach: how negative eWOM affect consumers' purchase intention (Liu *et al.*, 2022).

Practical implications

Similarly, potential strategies and actions can be established to support managers in charge of promoting a restaurant and improving the experience.

First, restaurants should provide both utilitarian benefits (i.e. quality and healthy ingredients, appropriate prices, rapid service) and hedonic benefits (pleasure, sensorial experiences, emotional encounters), as both of them play a crucial role in consumer satisfaction. In our study, the incidence of hedonic experiences is stronger, which means that emotional sensations could not be obviated in services encounters. Therefore, the findings suggest actionable strategies for restaurant managers as providing comfortable dining environments and creating emotionally engaging dining experiences. Managers should regularly assess and update the restaurant's environment to ensure it meets the expectations of their target market. In addition, restaurant managers should highlight these attributes in their communication strategies.

Second, and given that brand satisfaction and brand love seem to be two faces of the same coin, companies need to build brand. What is more, brand love encourages eWOM. Therefore, if brand love augments, positive eWOM will be spread. To build brand love a restaurant needs to establish a close and affective bond with the customer, so that they feel like part of the company. This could be done, for example, by creating brand communities, restaurants can create loyalty programs that offer exclusive benefits, host events, or encourage customers to share their dining experiences on social media. Furthermore, by allowing the customer to co-create with the company in the design of menus or service improvements can also enhance their emotional investment in the brand.

Third, since our results have indeed corroborated that the effects of dissatisfaction are significantly stronger than those of satisfaction, it should be a priority to win back dissatisfied customers. To this end, restaurants should train staff to handle complaints professionally, establish direct channels of communication with the customer, take an interest in the final outcome of their consumption experience, and solve possible incidents

that have occurred (for example, by changing dishes that do not meet the customer's expectations, or compensating for delays in service with a small gift or a free gift).

Limitations and future research

Amongst the main limitations could be mentioned the heterogeneity of the respondents, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The sample comprises a diverse group of respondents with varying backgrounds and experiences, making it necessary to consider these variations in future research. Additionally, the study focuses on the restaurant sector, which may limit the applicability of the findings to different contexts and industries. Thus, the research could be adapted to different contexts or industries considering the characteristics of those environments and how they might influence the relationships between the key variables studied.

A future line of research could include a replica of the study once some of the above-mentioned strategies have been implemented, to analyze the effect on brand loyalty and positive eWOM and to verify its effect on consumers.

As comment above, this study highlights the studied relationships are significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones, indicating a critical area for further exploration in understanding how negative experiences can disproportionately affect consumer perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how brand loyalty and eWOM evolve over time or the long-term effects of positive and negative brand experiences on these factors. Investigating the role of cultural factors in shaping brand perceptions and behaviors could also enrich the theoretical framework and offer more tailored marketing strategies.

Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between benefits, brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty and eWOM and the moderator role of positive or negative experience in the restaurant sector. The findings underline the importance of benefits, brand satisfaction, and brand love as antecedents of brand loyalty and eWOM outcomes. Moreover, the moderation role of experience revealed that the relationships are stronger for dissatisfied consumers. Consequently, the influence of negative experiences highlights the need for effective management strategies to address customer dissatisfaction.

The results offer valuable theoretical and practical insights, suggesting that restaurant managers should focus on delivering both utilitarian and hedonic benefits, addressing negative experiences promptly, and fostering emotional connections with customers.

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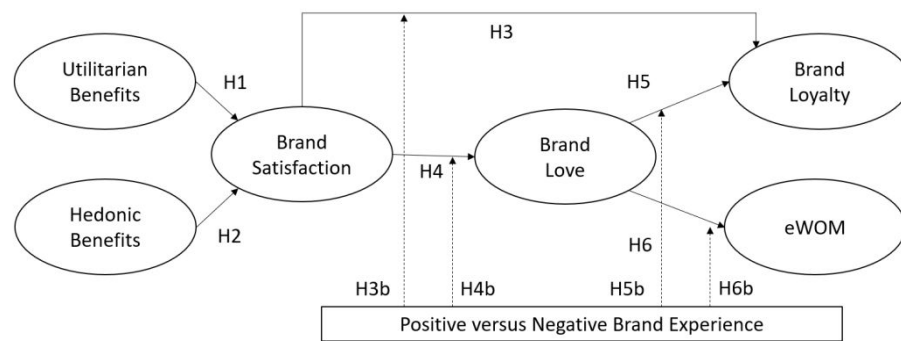
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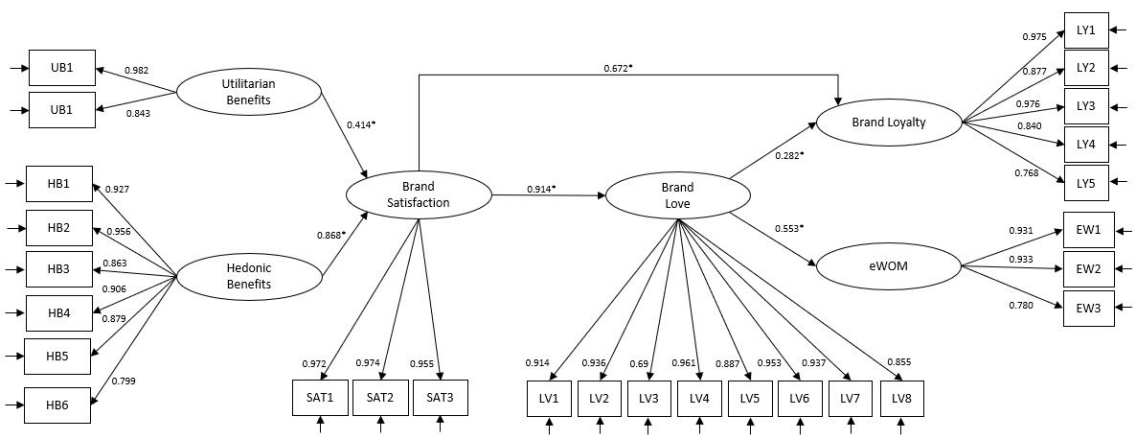
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British Food Journal

Figure 1. Theoretical model

Source(s): Authors' work

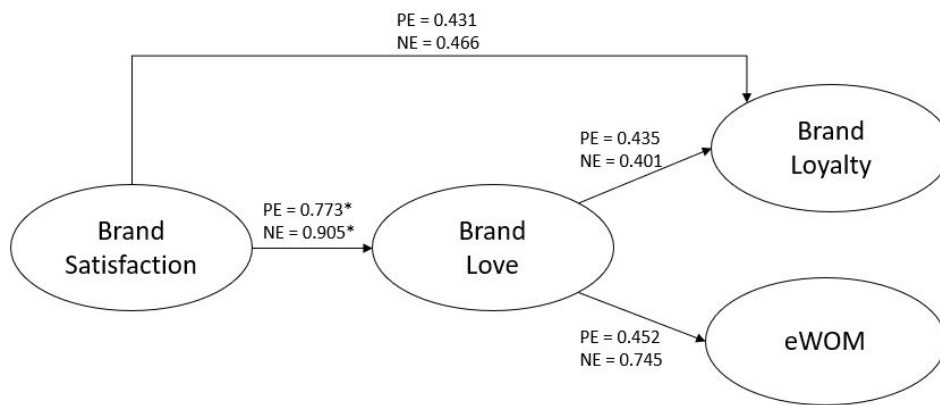
Figure 2. Structural model results



Note(s): $R^2(\text{Satisfaction})=0.924$; $R^2(\text{Love})=0.835$; $R^2(\text{Loyalty})=0.878$;
 $R^2(\text{eWOM})=0.306$

* $p<0.05$

Source(s): Authors' work

Figure 3. Multigroup structural model results

Note(s): PE = Positive experience; NE = Negative experience

* $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	Total (n=325)	
	n	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	221	68
Male	104	32
<i>Age (y/old)</i>		
16-24	153	47.1
25-34	37	11.4
35-44	32	9.8
45-54	72	22.2
55-64	22	6.8
>64	9	2.8
<i>Educational level</i>		
Secondary school or less	43	13.3
Vocational training cycle	42	12.9
Undergraduate	207	63.7
Master's and above	33	10.2
<i>Income</i>		
High	6	1.8
Medium-high	137	42.2
Medium-low	138	42.5
Low	38	11.7

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 2. Convergent validity and reliability

Construct/items	SFL	α	CR	AVE
UTILITARIAN BENEFITS		0.90	0.91	0.84
I accomplished what I needed	0.982			
I found the menu items I wanted	0.843			
HEDONIC BENEFITS		0.96	0.95	0.79
Truly felt like an escape	0.927			
It was truly enjoyable	0.956			
I enjoyed being immersed in exciting new items	0.863			
I enjoyed the experience itself, not just the food	0.906			
I'd a good time dining here, I felt free	0.879			
I was able to forget my problems	0.799			
BRAND LOYALTY		0.95	0.95	0.79
I'll choose this restaurant the next time	0.975			
I'll buy an offer of this restaurant	0.887			
I keep purchasing from this restaurant	0.976			
I'm committed to this restaurant	0.84			
I would be willing to pay more for this restaurant	0.768			
eWOM		0.91	0.86	0.86
I "talk up" this brand online	0.931			
I give this brand tons of positive eWOM	0.933			
I spread the good-word about this brand online	0.780			
BRAND LOVE		0.97	0.96	0.80
This brand makes me feel good	0.914			
This brand is totally awesome	0.936			
I've neutral feelings about this brand	0.69			
This brand makes me very happy	0.961			
I love this brand!	0.887			
I've no particular feelings about this brand	0.953			
I'm passionate about this brand	0.937			
I'm very attached to this brand	0.855			
BRAND SATISFACTION		0.97	0.97	0.93
Overall, I'm happy with the restaurant	0.972			
The restaurant meets my expectations	0.974			
I did the right thing when I came to this restaurant	0.955			

Note(s): SFL=standardised factor loading; CR=composite reliability; AVE=average variance extracted
 Global Fit: $\chi^2=35269.330$ ($p=0.00$); S-B $\chi^2=1344.9276$ (309 degrees of freedom) ($p=0.00$); GFI=0.80;
 RMSEA=0.07; SRMR=0.03. Incremental Fit: 0.97; AGFI=0.80; NFI=0.96; NNFI=0.96; CFI
 Robust=0.97

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
F1	0.92	0.55	0.93	0.91	0.92	0.95
F2	(0.501, 0.617)	0.90	0.63	0.51	0.56	0.54
F3	(0.919, 0.943)	(0.583, 0.683)	0.90	0.91	0.93	0.93
F4	(0.894, 0.93)	(0.453, 0.577)	(0.896, 0.932)	0.93	0.93	0.93
F5	(0.909, 0.937)	(0.505, 0.621)	(0.925, 0.949)	(0.917, 0.949)	0.90	0.96
F6	(0.942, 0.962)	(0.486, 0.602)	(0.922, 0.946)	(0.918, 0.95)	(0.961, 0.977)	0.96

Note(s): Above the diagonal: estimated inter factor correlation.
Diagonal: Square root of AVE
Below the diagonal: confidence interval for inter factor correlation
Source(s): Authors' work

Table 4. Results of hypotheses testing

H	Structural relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	T Robust *	Hypothesis
H1	Utilitarian Benefits→Brand Satisfaction	0.414	23.822*	✓
H2	Hedonic Benefits→Brand Satisfaction	0.868	46.340*	✓
H3a	Brand Satisfaction→Brand Loyalty	0.672	10.013*	✓
H4a	Brand Satisfaction→Brand Love	0.914	30.082*	✓
H5a	Brand Love→Brand Loyalty	0.282	4.132*	✓
H6a	Brand Love→eWOM	0.553	10.116*	✓
Global Fit: $\chi^2=35269.330$ ($p=0.00$); $S-B \chi^2 = 2233.1431$ (318 degrees of freedom) ($p=0.00$); $GFI=0.80$; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR= 0.1. Incremental Fit: 0.94; NFI =0.93; NNFI =0.93; CFI Robust=0.94				

* P<0.05.

Source(s): Authors' work

Table 5. Moderating Variable. Positive versus Negative Experience.

	Structural relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	T Robust *	Standardized Coefficient (β)	T Robust *	Contrast	χ ² (differences)
		Positive Experience		Negative Experience			
H3b	Brand Satisfaction→ Brand Loyalty	0.431	6.143*	0.466	6.143*	ns	2.031
H4b	Brand Satisfaction→ Brand Love	0.773	15.965*	0.905	15.965*	*	4.165
H5b	Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	0.435	6.060*	0.401	6.060*	ns	0.444
H6b	Brand Love→ eWOM	0.452	7.359*	0.745	7.359*	ns	0.384
Global Fit: $\chi^2=15435.012$ ($p=0.00$); S-B $\chi^2=2322.039$; 638 degrees of freedom) ($p=0.00$); GFI= 0.80; RMSEA=0.090<0.1; SRMR= 0.094 <0.1 Incremental Fit: AGFI= 0.80; NFI = 0.85; NNFI = 0.87; CFI Robust = 0.80							

*P<0.05; differences among groups are not significant (ns)

Source(s): Authors' work

14-Aug-2024

Dear Prof. Michael Carolan, Editor, British Food Journal

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to publish our paper “**Brand loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth antecedents: the moderating effects of experiences**”

We proceed to respond to the kind suggestions and recommendations of the reviewers:

Dear Reviewer 1:

Thank you very much for your detailed feedback. It has helped us a lot to improve the quality of our paper.

Following your comments, some changes have done as follow:

Originality- Comment 1: While I understand the competitive pressures and the influence of the internet necessitating new strategies for customer retention, I'm puzzled as to why the authors begin the discussion by focusing on the current state of lunches and dinners in restaurants to illustrate the industry's significance. Could this perhaps dilute the focus or mislead the reader about the main thrust of the research?

Answer: Yes, it is true. It could mislead the reader about the main thrust of the research. So, we re-written the introduction.

The restaurant industry is a promising sector, confirming that food is a basic need (Zanetta et al., 2024). According to the results of the Household Budget Survey (2023) (INE, 2024), households spent 3,311 euros in restaurants and hotels, 386 euros more than in 2022. This reflects the importance of the sector, as does the number of restaurants, which, according to the UVE Data Market Horeca 2024 in Spain (UVE, 2024), amount to 104,745 establishments (3.8% more than in 2023). However, restaurant is a complex sector because the relationship between services and customers (Zanetta et al., 2024).

...

Therefore, bearing in mind the collective viewpoints of Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this research study tries to understand stimulus and internal state to achieve higher loyalty and positive eWOM as behavioural responses of restaurant consumers.

Loyalty is an expression of a favourable attitude towards the brand that produces a more intense purchase intention in customers (Song et al., 2019). Cultivating the brand loyalty attained principal importance as far as the service sector is concerned, especially where service providers render services with minor distinctions and fight in complex environment, particularly in the restaurant sector (Javer et al, 2021).

...

Improving loyalty and positive eWOM is a challenge for restaurants managers. Despite the various factors can influence consumers' decisions making processes, two stimulus (utilitarian and hedonic benefits) and two organism or internal state (satisfaction and love) have been identified by other studies. Thus, Faruq *et al.*, (2023) examined the impact of hedonic and utilitarian benefits to improve behavioural intentions and consumer satisfaction on a restaurant. Satisfaction is related to customers' evaluation of how effectively the product and its attributes have fulfilled their needs and wants (Byun and Jang, 2019) because customers feel satisfied when the function of a product or a service meets their expectations (Shen *et al.*, 2021).

However, and despite numerous investigations in the field, the antecedents of loyalty and eWOM still requires further analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Saydam and Altun, 2023). The main aim of this study is to bridge this research gap by analysing and comparing positive and negative experience in a restaurant.

Thirdly, a more detailed examination of the consumer behaviour in the restaurant sector is carried out, the analysis of which has become a key aspect and more so if its impact on brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty or eWOM are studied (Oliveira Sanntini *et al.*, 2018).

Originality- Comment 2: The paper states that the diversity of touchpoints and the lack of control over eWOM pose significant challenges to ensuring memorable customer experiences and loyalty (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). However, this seems somewhat disconnected from the earlier assertion that “due to intensified competition and the influence of information on the internet, restaurants must devise new ways to attract and retain customers.” Could you clarify how these points are conceptually linked within the context of the industry's dynamics?

Answer: We have eliminated this confusing explanation in the introduction.

Originality- Comment 3: The extensive discussion on eWOM initially suggests that it is the main focus of the study, yet there is a sudden shift to loyalty, which is defined as a key trigger for eWOM. If the research aims to explore the antecedents of loyalty and eWOM, why reveal upfront that loyalty is a precursor? It seems there might be a lack of clarity whether the study is examining the antecedents of eWOM alone or both loyalty and eWOM. Could you clarify the research focus to better align with the structure and objectives outlined in the study?

Answer: We have clarified the research focus in the introduction to better align with the structure and objectives outlined in the study. With the rewriting of the introduction (pp. 1-4) we try to clarify that the study examines the antecedents of both loyalty and eWOM and that both are on the same level.

Originality- Comment 4: If the intent is to examine the antecedents of both loyalty and eWOM, it would be beneficial to review which factors have historically been identified

as potential influencers before justifying the choice of experience, brand love, and satisfaction. The factors listed in the current section struggle to convincingly justify their relevance and necessity in the study.

Answer: We have added 3 theories for justify the relevance and necessity of the factors listed in the study. *Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980), *Theory of Reasoned Action* (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and *S-O-R model* (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

Originality- Comment 5: Given that subsequent sections of the paper suggest significant moderating effects of experiences, why not highlight this contribution more prominently? A title adjustment could better reflect the findings and enhance the focus on these significant contributions, rather than a general verification of cause-and-effect relationships.

Answer: We have adjusted the title as follows: *Brand loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth antecedents: the moderating effects of experiences*.

Originality- Comment 6: Integrating findings from recent studies can deepen the understanding of eWOM and loyalty dynamics. For example, Fatmawati and Amanati (2023) illustrate the direct impact of eWOM on customer loyalty. Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan (2020) highlight consumer brand engagement as a mediator between eWOM and satisfaction, while studies by Moliner-Velázquez, Fuentes-Blasco, and Gil-Saura (2019), and Ferreira, Rodrigues, and Rodrigues (2019) show that technological advancements and emotional brand experiences significantly influence loyalty. These insights could significantly enrich the paper's analysis of customer loyalty mechanisms in the restaurant industry.

Answer: We have integrated findings of the proposed studies and others for enrich the paper's analysis of customer loyalty mechanisms in the restaurant industry.

Fatmawati, I., and Amanati, A. K. (2023), "How Does Consumer Experience with Cosmetics Products Create EWOM, Satisfaction, and Loyalty?", *Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 53-71, doi: 10.18196/mb.v14i1.14525

Ferreira, P., Rodrigues, P., and Rodrigues, P. (2019), "Brand love as mediator of the brand experience-satisfaction-loyalty relationship in a retail fashion brand", *Management & Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 278-291, doi: 10.2478/mmcks-2019-0020

Moliner-Velázquez, B., Fuentes-Blasco, M., and Gil-Saura, I. (2019), "The role of ICT, eWOM and guest characteristics in loyalty", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 153-168, doi: 10.1108/JHTT-11-2017-0120

Srivastava, M., and Sivaramakrishnan, S. (2021), "The impact of eWOM on consumer brand engagement", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 39, No 3, pp. 469-484, doi: 10.1108/MIP-06-2020-0263

Relationship to Literature- Comment 1: The authors primarily rely on the study by Hlee et al., (2019) to discuss the impact of utilitarian and hedonic benefits on satisfaction. This narrow focus might limit the comprehensiveness of the argument. It would be beneficial to incorporate a broader range of scholarly perspectives to enrich the discussion and provide a more robust theoretical foundation.

Answer: We have incorporated an others scholarly perspectives to enrich the discussion as follow:

... Specifically, a recent study concluded that many hedonic and utilitarian aspects can significantly affect be satisfied with a restaurant (Zanetta *et al.*, 2024). Parsa *et al.*, (2020) proposed hedonic and utilitarian concept is not a bimodal system but a continuum raging from high utilitarian to high hedonic. On this continuum, a restaurant's position can vary based on the type of dining experiences it provides, whether they are utilitarian or hedonic, and the proportion of each. However, following the dichotomous approach defended by Chitturi *et al.*, (2008, p. 48), products that meet or exceed customers' utilitarian needs and fulfill prevention goals enhance customer satisfaction, and products that meet or exceed customers' hedonic wants and fulfill promotion goals enhance customer delight.

...
Recently, Ponsignon *et al.*, (2024) documented the existence of a predominantly utilitarian and a predominantly hedonic model, articulating why and how consumers pursue distinctly different types of consumer journeys.

...
According to Mehrabian and Russell, (1974), Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model accentuates that improvement in the assessment of internal procedure of the organism is elicited by a stimulus that influences the response. Referring to this, utilitarian and hedonic benefits that the service can provide act as impetus and are capable of influencing customers' satisfaction.
Similar to the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), if functional benefits augment, users' satisfaction augments also; and the same occurs for hedonic benefits.

Relationship to Literature- Comment 2: The paper does not clearly define what is meant by 'benefits' and 'experience' in the introduction, and these terms are not given dedicated sections. Instead, benefits are only mentioned within the context of brand satisfaction antecedents. Clarifying whether 'benefits' are considered part of 'experience' would help in aligning the paper's terminology and improving its conceptual clarity.

Answer: We re-written the literature review (pp. 4-13) trying to align the paper's terminology and to improve its conceptual clarity.

Relationship to Literature- Comment 3: The relationship between user-generated content and 'experience' needs clarification. Is user-generated content being categorized as part of the customer experience? Defining how user-generated content relates to the overall customer experience could enhance the reader's understanding and ensure the coherence of the research framework.

Answer: This concept appeared in the title of the section and in the explanation of table 5 but when we have re-written the text, it has been replaced as follows:

Moderation role of experience: positive versus negative customers

As Table 5 shows, the same hypotheses are accepted for both sub-groups, validating the moderation role of experience.

Methodology- Comment 1: The causal sequence outlined in Figure 1, from experience to satisfaction to brand love, is not clearly justified. A detailed explanation of why this particular progression is hypothesized would aid in understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the model. Clarifying the rationale behind linking these specific

constructs sequentially would enhance the logical flow and theoretical coherence of the research framework.

Answer: We have added an explanation to clarify the rationale behind linking these specific constructs sequentially in our new redaction of the literature review. In addition, we have added a paragraph before Figure 1, as follows:

The current research employed three theories as a theoretical foundation, which provides a base for hypotheses: S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory and TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Capitalizing on these theories and the literature review, this study proposed the theoretical model shown in Figure 1.

Methodology- Comment 2: The current research model appears to lack a robust theoretical framework that convincingly supports the proposed relationships. A more comprehensive presentation of the theoretical foundations that inform the structure of the research model is necessary. This would include discussing relevant literature and theories that support the linkage of experience to satisfaction and subsequently to brand love, thereby reinforcing the validity of the research design and its conceptual alignment.

Answer: We have included new relevant literature and 3 theories that support the relationship proposed in our study.

Ajzen, I., and Fishbein, M. (1980), *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Cankül, D., Kaya, S., and Kızıldaş, M. Ç. (2024), "The effect of gastronomic experience on restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty", *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, Vol. 36, pp. 100908.

Chitturi, R., Raghunathan, R., & Mahajan, V. (2008). Delight by design: The role of hedonic versus utilitarian benefits. *Journal of marketing*, 72(3), 48-63.

Faruq, M. A. A., Bassalamah, M. R., Sudaryanti, D., and Azizah, N. N. (2023), "Hedonic values and utilitarian values to improve behavioral intentions and consumer satisfaction on producto", *Aptisi Transactions on Technopreneurship (ATT)*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 319-333

...

Javed, S., Rashidin, M. S., Zhu, M., Xu, Z., Jian, W., and Zuo, S. (2021), "Combined effects of drivers and impact of customer satisfaction on brand loyalty: The contingent effect of social trust", *Sage Open*, Vol. 11 No 1, pp. 21582440211003566.

Kim, Y. J., Park, J. S., and Jeon, H. M. (2021), "Experiential value, satisfaction, brand love, and brand loyalty toward robot barista coffee shop: The moderating effect of generation", *Sustainability*, Vol. 13 No. 21, pp. 12029.

Liao, J., He, S., Feng, W., and Filieri, R. (2024), "'I Love It' Versus 'I Recommend It': The Impact of Implicit and Explicit Endorsement Styles on Electronic Word-of-Mouth Persuasiveness", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 63 No 4, pp. 779-795.

Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J.A. (1974), *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

...

Oliver, R. L. (1980), “A Cognitive Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Satisfaction Decisions”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol.17, pp.46- 49.

Parsa, H. G., Shuster, B. K., and Bujisic, M. (2020), “New classification system for the US restaurant industry: Application of utilitarian and hedonic continuum model”, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, Vol. 61No. 4, pp. 379-400.

Ponsignon, F., Bauman, M., and Lunardo, R. (2024), “Seeking relief or reward? A utilitarian-hedonic journey perspective on escapism”, *European Journal of Marketing*.

Rodríguez-López, M. E., Alcántara-Pilar, J. M., and Del Barrio-García, S. (2023), “Satisfaction or delight? A cross-cultural study of loyalty formation linked to two restaurant types”, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, Vol. 6 No. 5, pp. 2646-2667.

...

Zanetta, L. D. A., Xavier, M. C., Hakim, M. P., Stedefeldt, E., Zanin, L. M., Medeiros, C. O., and da Cunha, D. T. (2024), “How does the consumer choose a restaurant? An overview of the determinants of consumer satisfaction” *Food Research International*, pp. 114369.

Results- Comment 1: The section on limitations and future research directions appears underdeveloped, particularly regarding suggestions for extending the model, exploring new variables, and developing related marketing strategies. The paper would benefit from a more comprehensive exploration of potential areas for future inquiry, including how the research could be adapted or expanded to different contexts or industries. Offering a roadmap for future studies based on the current findings would greatly enhance the paper’s utility and impact.

Answer: We re-written the section **Limitations and future research**

Amongst the main limitations could be mentioned the heterogeneity of the respondents, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The sample comprises a diverse group of respondents with varying backgrounds and experiences, making it necessary to consider these variations in future research. Additionally, the study focuses on the restaurant sector, which may limit the applicability of the findings to different contexts and industries. Thus, the research could be adapted to different contexts or industries considering the characteristics of those environments and how they might influence the relationships between the key variables studied.

...

As comment above, this study highlights the studied relationships are significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones, indicating a critical area for further exploration in understanding how negative experiences can disproportionately affect consumer perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how brand loyalty and eWOM evolve over time or the long-term effects of positive and negative brand experiences on these factors. Investigating the role of cultural factors in shaping brand perceptions and behaviors could also enrich the theoretical framework and offer more tailored marketing strategies.

Results- Comment 2: Although the paper lists 'conclusion, implication, and limitations/future lines,' it seems that only 'implications and future lines' are effectively

addressed. It is recommended to revise the headings to 'discussions, implications, and limitations/future lines,' and to add a 'conclusions' section at the end of the document.

Answer: We have revised the headings and add new explanations and a 'conclusions' section at the end of the document.

Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between benefits, brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty and eWOM and the moderator role of positive or negative experience in the restaurant sector. The findings underline the importance of benefits, brand satisfaction, and brand love as antecedents of brand loyalty and eWOM outcomes. Moreover, the moderation role of experience revealed that the relationships are stronger for dissatisfied consumers. Consequently, the influence of negative experiences highlights the need for effective management strategies to address customer dissatisfaction.

The results offer valuable theoretical and practical insights, suggesting that restaurant managers should focus on delivering both utilitarian and hedonic benefits, addressing negative experiences promptly, and fostering emotional connections with customers.

Implications for research, practice and/or society- Comment 1: The discussion on theoretical implications primarily validates variables with past literature. To enhance the scholarly depth, it is recommended that the authors establish stronger linkages and resonances with underlying theories. Articulating how the findings integrate with or challenge existing theoretical frameworks would substantiate the study's contributions and enrich the academic discourse.

Answer: We have tried to establish stronger linkages and resonances with underlying theories.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretical implications

...

First, this research proposes a theoretical model that explains the influence of the utilitarian and the hedonic benefits on brand satisfaction. This proposed model aligning with established theories such as Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

Second, the study adds to the current literature by shedding light on the impact of benefits, brand satisfaction and brand love as significant antecedents of brand loyalty and eWOM.

...

Third, the research contributes to the extant literature on satisfied versus dissatisfied customers.

Implications for research, practice and/or society- Comment 2: The practical implications provided need to be more deeply connected with actual restaurant operations. The authors should explore and discuss how their findings can be applied in the real-world setting of restaurant management, addressing specific operational strategies that could benefit from the study's insights. This approach would not only

bridge the gap between theory and practice but also provide tangible recommendations for industry practitioners.

Answer: We have tried to be more deeply connected with actual restaurant operations.

Practical implications

...

Therefore, the findings suggest actionable strategies for restaurant managers as providing comfortable dining environments and creating emotionally engaging dining experiences. Managers should regularly assess and update the restaurant’s environment to ensure it meets the expectations of their target market.

...

This could be done, for example, by creating brand communities, restaurants can create loyalty programs that offer exclusive benefits, host events, or encourage customers to share their dining experiences on social media. Furthermore, by allowing the customer to co-create with the company in the design of menus or service improvements can also enhance their emotional investment in the brand.

...

Quality of Communication - Comment 1: Overall, the paper appears well-crafted to meet the expectations of its readership in the field of marketing and consumer research, with careful attention paid to clarity, readability, and the use of technical language.

Answer: We have revised all the paper.

We hope this new version is more aligned and help to clarify the population, sampling technique and implications. Thank you again for your time. We are extremely grateful for your comments. We hope, the new version of the paper reaches your expectations.

We hope that changes made based on the comments made by reviewer 2 will also be to your liking.

Dear Reviewer 2:

Thank you for your important feedback. It has helped us to improve the quality of our paper.

Following your comments, some changes have done as follow:

Comment 1. Abstract: The purpose should be more clearly presented. In Originality/value, the expression like “researching brand loyalty and eWOM antecedents and the moderation effect of brand experience.” Is not clear. The authors need to revise the abstract.

Answer: We have revised the abstract and we have re-written the most unclear parts.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was carried out of restaurant satisfied and dissatisfied consumers. Structural equation modelling (SEM) and multi-group analysis were performed to examine the cause-and-effect relationship in both groups.

Findings – The results show the relevance of benefits, brand satisfaction and brand love as causes for brand loyalty and e-WOM. Also, the relationships are significantly stronger for dissatisfied consumers than for satisfied ones.

Originality/value - The outcome of the research provides new insights to develop a conceptual S-O-R model of consumers' restaurant behavior by drawing comparisons across satisfied and dissatisfied ones.

Comment 2. Introduction: Information regarding the costs of lunches and dinners in restaurants in the first paragraph of introduction was published in 2018. The information should be updated.

Answer: We have updated the information of the first paragraph as follows: The restaurant industry is a promising sector, confirming that food is a basic need (Zanetta et al., 2024). According to the results of the Household Budget Survey (2023) (INE, 2024), households spent 3,311 euros in restaurants and hotels, 386 euros more than in 2022. This reflects the importance of the sector, as does the number of restaurants, which, according to the UVE Data Market Horeca 2024 in Spain (UVE, 2024), amount to 104,745 establishments (3.8% more than in 2023). However, restaurant is a complex sector because the relationship between services and customers (Zanetta et al., 2024).

Comment 3. Introduction: I am not sure about the last sentence in introduction. “In this research, 325 positive comments and 323 negative ones were analysed, based on a positive and a negative personal experience in a restaurant.” Please clearly present the information.

Answer: We have eliminated this sentence and re-written some parts of the introduction.

Therefore, bearing in mind the collective viewpoints of Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), this research study tries to understand stimulus and internal state to achieve higher loyalty and positive eWOM as behavioural responses of restaurant consumers.

Loyalty is an expression of a favourable attitude towards the brand that produces a more intense purchase intention in customers (Song et al., 2019). Cultivating the brand loyalty attained principal importance as far as the service sector is concerned, especially where service providers render services with minor distinctions and fight in complex environment, particularly in the restaurant sector (Javer et al, 2021).

...

Improving loyalty and positive eWOM is a challenge for restaurants managers. Despite the various factors can influence consumers' decisions making processes, two stimulus (utilitarian and hedonic benefits) and two organism or internal state (satisfaction and love) have been identified by other studies. Thus, Faruq *et al.*, (2023) examined the impact of hedonic and utilitarian benefits to improve behavioural intentions and consumer satisfaction on a restaurant. Satisfaction is related to customers' evaluation of how effectively the product and its attributes have fulfilled their needs and wants (Byun and Jang, 2019) because customers feel satisfied when the function of a product or a service meets their expectations (Shen *et al.*, 2021).

...

However, and despite numerous investigations in the field, the antecedents of loyalty and eWOM still requires further analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Saydam and Altun, 2023). The main aim of this study is to bridge this research gap by analysing and comparing positive and negative experience in a restaurant.

...

Thirdly, a more detailed examination of the consumer behaviour in the restaurant sector is carried out, the analysis of which has become a key aspect and more so if its impact on brand satisfaction, brand love, brand loyalty or eWOM are studied (Oliveira Sanntini et al., 2018).

Comment 4. Literature review: “Brand satisfaction antecedents in a restaurant experience” are not fully supported based on conceptual and empirical research. In literature review, authors sufficiently provide important and relevant literature and support their ideas. However, the literature includes few studies.

Comment 5. Literature review: The recent literature published after 2022 is rarely shown in literature review. The authors must include seminal and recent literature.

Answer comments 4 and 5: We have included more studies and recently published literature.

Ajzen, I., and Fishbein, M. (1980), *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*.

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Cankül, D., Kaya, S., and Kızıltaş, M. Ç. (2024), “The effect of gastronomic experience on restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty”, *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, Vol. 36, pp. 100908.
- Chitturi, R., Raghunathan, R., & Mahajan, V. (2008). Delight by design: The role of hedonic versus utilitarian benefits. *Journal of marketing*, 72(3), 48-63.
- Faruq, M. A. A., Bassalamah, M. R., Sudaryanti, D., and Azizah, N. N. (2023), “Hedonic values and utilitarian values to improve behavioral intentions and consumer satisfaction on producto”, *Aptisi Transactions on Technopreneurship (ATT)*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 319-333
- Fatmawati, I., and Amanati, A. K. (2023), “How Does Consumer Experience with Cosmetics Products Create EWOM, Satisfaction, and Loyalty?”, *Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 53-71, doi: 10.18196/mb.v14i1.14525
- Ferreira, P., Rodrigues, P., and Rodrigues, P. (2019), “Brand love as mediator of the brand experience-satisfaction-loyalty relationship in a retail fashion brand”, *Management & Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 278-291, doi: 10.2478/mmcks-2019-0020
- INE (2024), *Household Budget Survey (HBS) Year 2023. Final results*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Spain.
- Joreskog, K., and Sorbom, D. (1993), *Structural equation modelling: Guidelines for determining model fit*. NY: University Press of America.
- Javed, S., Rashidin, M. S., Zhu, M., Xu, Z., Jian, W., and Zuo, S. (2021), “Combined effects of drivers and impact of customer satisfaction on brand loyalty: The contingent effect of social trust”, *Sage Open*, Vol. 11 No 1, pp. 21582440211003566.
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- Liao, J., He, S., Feng, W., and Filieri, R. (2024), ““I Love It” Versus “I Recommend It”: The Impact of Implicit and Explicit Endorsement Styles on Electronic Word-of-Mouth Persuasiveness”, *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 63 No 4, pp. 779-795.
- Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J.A. (1974), *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Moliner-Velázquez, B., Fuentes-Blasco, M., and Gil-Saura, I. (2019), “The role of ICT, eWOM and guest characteristics in loyalty”, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 153-168, doi: 10.1108/JHTT-11-2017-0120
- Oliver, R. L. (1980), “A Cognitive Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Satisfaction Decisions”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol.17, pp.46- 49.
- Parsa, H. G., Shuster, B. K., and Bujisic, M. (2020), “New classification system for the US restaurant industry: Application of utilitarian and hedonic continuum model”, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, Vol. 61No. 4, pp. 379-400.
- Ponsignon, F., Bauman, M., and Lunardo, R. (2024), “Seeking relief or reward? A utilitarian-hedonic journey perspective on escapism”, *European Journal of Marketing*.
- Rodríguez-López, M. E., Alcántara-Pilar, J. M., and Del Barrio-García, S. (2023), “Satisfaction or delight? A cross-cultural study of loyalty formation linked to two restaurant types”, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, Vol. 6 No. 5, pp. 2646-2667.

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3 Srivastava, M., and Sivaramakrishnan, S. (2021), “The impact of eWOM on consumer brand
4 engagement”, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 39, No 3, pp. 469-484, doi:
5 10.1108/MIP-06-2020-0263
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7 UVE (2024), *UVE Data Market Horeca 2024*, Uvesolutions. Spain
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9 Zanetta, L. D. A., Xavier, M. C., Hakim, M. P., Stedefeldt, E., Zanin, L. M., Medeiros, C. O.,
10 and da Cunha, D. T. (2024), “How does the consumer choose a restaurant? An overview
11 of the determinants of consumer satisfaction” *Food Research International*, pp. 114369.
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16 **Comment 6. Method:** What does “Global analysis” mean on page 15?

17 **Answer:** We have replaced it for: **Measurement validation**
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22 **Comment 7. Results:** The respondents information should clearly be reported. Please
23 present all information about the respondents, including frequency and percent.
24

25 **Answer:** We have added a paragraph and Table 1.
26

27 ***Respondents’ information***

28 A sample of 325 answers were received from Spanish people, with a quite homogeneous
29 distribution along the North, South, East and West of the country. From this sample, 648
30 restaurant experiences were collected (325 positive and 323 negative). Females
31 represented 68% of the total interviewees. The distribution among the diverse age ranges
32 was: 47.1% between 16 and 24 years and 22.2% between 45 and 54 years, with 63.7% of
33 them having university studies. Regarding income, the sample was equally distributed
34 among medium-high (42.2%) and medium-low income (42.5%) income levels (see Table
35 1).
36

37 **Table 1.** Demographics
38

Variable	Total (n=325)	
	n	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	221	68
Male	104	32
<i>Age (y/old)</i>		
16-24	153	47.1
25-34	37	11.4
35-44	32	9.8
45-54	72	22.2
55-64	22	6.8
>64	9	2.8
<i>Educational level</i>		
Secondary school or less	43	13.3
Vocational training cycle	42	12.9
Undergraduate	207	63.7
Master’s and above	33	10.2
<i>Income</i>		
High	6	1.8
Medium-high	137	42.2

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Medium-low	138	42.5
Low	38	11.7

Source(s): Authors' work

Comment 8. Results Could you report RMSEA and SRMR in both tables and the results?

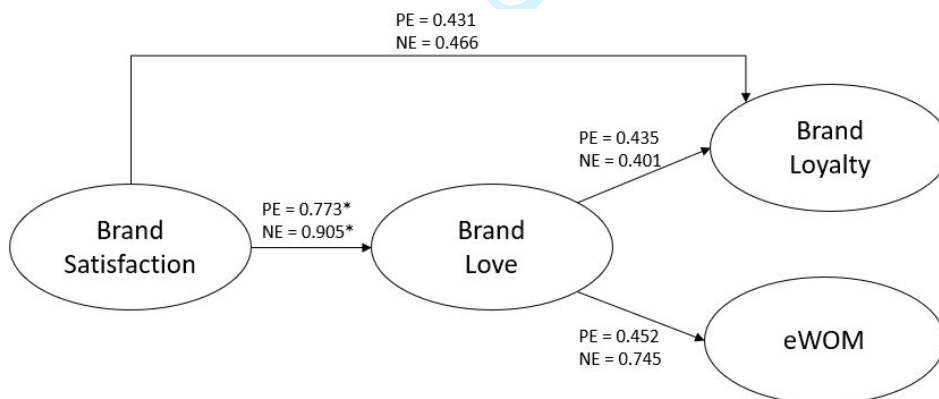
Answer: We have added this information (page 16, convergent validity and structural model. Page 17).

Comment 9. Results: In table 5, the model fits do not show satisfied values. Could you explain about it?

Answer: We have explained as follows:

Fit indices showed moderated fits to the data (GFI=0.80; RMSEA=0.090; SRMR=0.094; AGFI=0.80; NFI=0.85; NNFI=0.87; CFI Robust=0.80). Though the fit is not perfect, it may still be acceptable for assessing the hypothesized relationships, especially with a complex model. Thus, the conceptual model can be accepted for assessing the hypothesized relationships, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Multigroup structural model results



Note(s): PE = Positive experience; NE = Negative experience

*p<0.05

Source(s): Authors' work

Comment 10. Results: Could you add the chi-square differences of the moderating variables in Table 5 and present the results in the manuscript?

Answer: We have added this information in Table 5 and results in page 18.

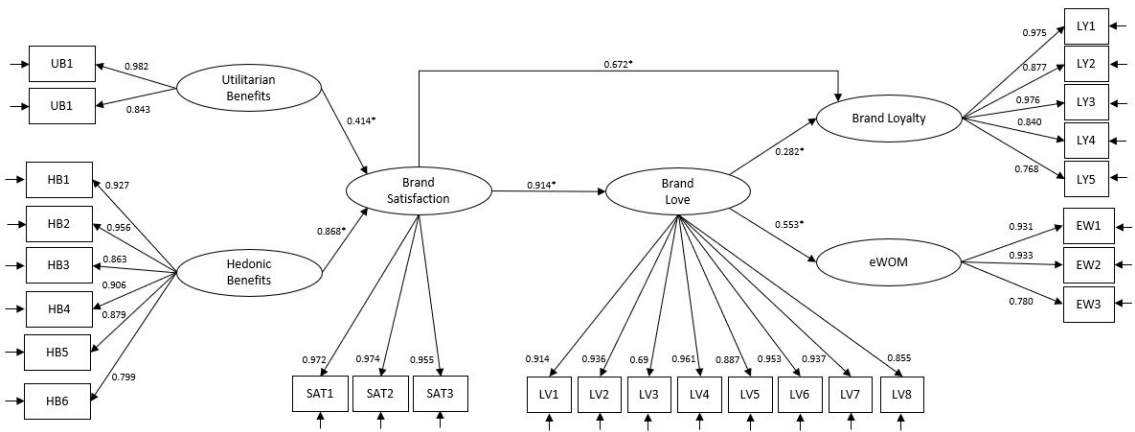
Comment 11. Star marks: Could you present star marks consistently?

Answer: Yes, we have corrected this mistake in the tables.

Comment 12. Results: If the final SEM results are presented in the figure, the readers may easily understand the results. And please add R-squared.

Answer: We have added R-squared and Figure 2 with the final SEM results.

Figure 2. Structural model results



Note(s): $R^2(\text{Satisfaction})=0.924$; $R^2(\text{Love})=0.835$; $R^2(\text{Loyalty})=0.878$;

$R^2(\text{eWOM})=0.306$

* $p<0.05$

Source(s): Authors' work

Comment 12. Results and discussion: Please report results and discussion separately.

Answer: We have reported results (page 15) and discussion (page 19) separately.

Comment 14. Conclusions, implication and limitations/future lines: Please add implications in discussion.

Answer: We have re-written the final part of the article **Theoretical and practical implications; Limitations and future research; and Conclusions.**

Additional Questions:

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Overall, the model is interesting and collecting both positive and negative experiences is also interesting. However, the explanation about the positive and negative experiences at the restaurants and the link between experience and the proposed model are not well discussed in literature review.

Answer: We have re-written discussion and justification of the proposed model. We have added an explanation to clarify the rationale behind linking these specific constructs sequentially in our new redaction of the literature review. In addition, we have added a paragraph before Figure 1, as follows:

The current research employed three theories as a theoretical foundation, which provides a base for hypotheses: S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory and TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Capitalizing on these theories and the literature review, this study proposed the theoretical model shown in Figure 1.

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Literature review is not well written. I have more comments below.

Answer: We have re-written literature review (pp. 4-13). We have incorporated an others scholarly perspectives to enrich the discussion.

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: methodology is interesting. However, there are many missing information.

Answer: We have added missing information (page 13).

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: Results are not well written. More information should be added. Especially, the respondents information should be reported clearly.

Answer: We have added more information in the results section (pp. 15-19).

5. Implications for research, practice and/or society: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: The structure should be revised.

Answer: We have revised the structure and add new sections.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretical implications

Practical implications

Limitations and future research

Conclusions

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Overall, the manuscript is not well written. however, the proposed model and the research methodology are interesting.

Answer: We have re-written part of manuscript and we have revised all the paper.

Thank you very much for your kind review and we apologize for the mistakes. We hope this new version is more aligned and help to clarify the global analysis and the results discussion. Thank you again for your time. We are extremely grateful for your comments. We hope, the new version of the paper reaches your expectations.

We hope that changes made based on the comments made by reviewer 1 will also be to your liking.

Sincerely,

The authors