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Investigating the key factors affecting behavioral intentions

Evidence from a full-service restaurant setting

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aimed at investigating factors that contribute to increasing full-service restaurant customers' behavioral intentions. Unlike previous research, this study integrated both affective and cognitive contributors to customer satisfaction and relationship quality in explaining customers' behavioral intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were obtained through a questionnaire survey of full-service restaurant customers in a selected US metropolitan area. The data were subjected to structural equation modeling through the AMOS 5 program.

Findings – Among the nine hypothesized paths, six were supported and three new paths were included to improve the model fit. Affect is noted to be a major contributor to both customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Customer satisfaction is a direct antecedent to trust but indirect to commitment. Noteworthy is the direct impact of service encounter performance on customer satisfaction.

Research limitations/implications – Despite making use of a sample drawn from only a few selected areas and employing some constructs that are liable to expansion, the study has implications for the hospitality industry from both the theoretical and practical points of view.

Originality/value – This study reappraises the contributors to behavioral intentions in restaurant settings, providing valuable insight to managers on attracting and satisfying their customers.

Keywords Affect, Behavioural intentions, Restaurants, Perceived price, Relationship quality, Hospitality services, Consumer behaviour, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Repeatedly, it has been noted that service-encounter performance contributes to customer satisfaction (Price *et al.*, 1995; Wu and Liang, 2009), a topic, which, thanks to its keen relationship to profit increases, is critical to the success of any service business (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1994). This notion has sparked interest in the antecedents of customer satisfaction from both the academic and managerial spheres (Oliver, 1993). Subsequent research endeavors have led to the development of the popular disconfirmation model, wherein customer satisfaction is derived from the comparison of the expected service performance and the perceived actual service performance. However, despite its being a powerful predictor, the disconfirmation paradigm has, of late, been challenged (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997; Homburg *et al.*, 2006).

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Contemporary customer-satisfaction researchers have noted customer satisfaction to be not only a function of cognition but also of affect (e.g. Edvardsson, 2005; Homburg *et al.*, 2006; Liljander and Strandvik, 1997; Lin, 2004; Oliver, 1993; Yu and Dean, 2001). Affect, unlike cognition, represents subjective mental feelings that can be experienced through their emotional, mood and attitudinal components (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Titz, 2008). Its experiential denominator entails a causative context, such as service encounters in service settings that can include the environment, service providers, and other customers in the environment (Wu and Liang, 2009).

As research on the customer-service phenomenon has progressed, research elucidating the impact of cognition and affect on customers' satisfaction has followed suit. Nevertheless, the research findings are inconclusive as some have noted affect or emotions to have the greater impact on customer satisfaction (Lashley, 2008) while others uphold the supremacy of cognition (Burns and Neisner, 2006). Furthermore, the differential effects of cognition and affect have been extended customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions that is still debatable like its antecedent (Bigne *et al.*, 2008). The impact of customer satisfaction on behavioral intentions has been noted to be non linear (Anderson *et al.*, 1994), with different factors like customer characteristics (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001) influencing the relationship. Cognition (e.g. perceived price) and affect are contributors to customer satisfaction, and they depend on customers' psychological characteristics, implying they should have a differential effect on behavioral intentions (Martin *et al.*, 2008), but this has yet to be confirmed. Moreover, the relationship quality between the service provider and the customer has been shown to mediate the customer satisfaction-behavioral intentions relationship (Kim and Han, 2008). Although the importance of service-encounter performance, perceived price, affect, satisfaction, and relationship quality in forming behavioral intentions has been emphasized in the previous literature, no single research effort has integrated these constructs into a single framework that provides a clear understanding of the formation of behavioral intentions in the restaurant industry.

This paper sets out to contribute to the discussion by investigating the factors that contribute to restaurant customers' behavioral intentions toward restaurants. Specifically, the paper is aimed at exploring the following questions: Does service-encounter performance have an impact on perceived price and affect? Do perceived price and affect contribute differently to customer satisfaction? Does customer satisfaction reinforce relationship quality (trust and commitment) towards the service provider? Do satisfaction, trust, and commitment mediate the effects of service encounter performance, perceived price, and affect on behavioral intentions (i.e. intentions to repurchase and engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) activity)? In paving way for the hypotheses that answer these research questions, the following sections include a brief literature review that is followed by the conceptual model and methods used in this study. The results are then explained in the ensuing discussion, followed by conclusions and implications.

Literature review

Service encounter performance

Service encounters are central to customer satisfaction (Keillor *et al.*, 2004). The concept generally refers to the customer's experience that extends over time (Bitran *et al.*, 2008; Walker, 1995). The encounter, or moment of truth (Gil *et al.*, 2008), arises when the

customer interacts with the service provider in the form of its employees and physical surroundings (Chandon *et al.*, 1996) or environment, as well as with other customers that are present during that encounter (Wu and Liang, 2009). Among the constituent variables that create service encounters, the interaction between service employees and the customer has been demonstrated to be a major component (Wu and Liang, 2009). Consequentially, some authors have taken a narrow perspective on service encounters to reflect only the interpersonal interaction between the customer and service employees (e.g. Chandon *et al.*, 1996; Farrell *et al.*, 2001). Recognizing the major impact that service employees have on customers' service encounters, this study accepts the narrow interpersonal interaction perspective while acknowledging the broader definition of the service encounter. Therefore, service encounter in this study is operationalized as service-encounter performance that reflects the employee's service provision.

Perceived price as a cognitive element

According to Zeithaml's (1988) definition, price refers to what the customer is giving up or sacrificing in order to obtain a product or a service. Customers generally perceive price as objective or monetary price and perceived or non-monetary price (Han and Ryu, 2009; Zeithaml, 1988). The former indicates the actual price tagged for the product or service, while the latter refers to the price that is encoded by the customer in a comparative and subjective manner. According to Zeithaml's (1988) model, the use of perceived price is more encompassing than the use of objective price. This argument posits that the objective price does influence customer behavior, but only after the perceived price has been encoded by the customer. Moreover, Han and Kim (2009), taking a restaurant-service encounter as an example, amplify the use of perceived price to show how it factors in other service elements beyond the stated menu price. The main fulcrum for perceived price is the encoding process (Zeithaml, 1984), wherein the customer interprets the objective price into the perceived price. Accordingly, the interpretation process entails a comparison between different service providers or products with respect to the objective price and what is received through the exchange. This study borrows this subjective and comparative nature of perceived price in operationalizing the construct. Since perceived price entails comparison, it then logically falls under the cognitive element or what is referred to utilitarian value by Ryu *et al.* (2010) that involves thinking and evaluation in contrast to affective feeling.

Affect

The term affect refers to mental processes that can include emotions, moods, and attitudes (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999). The differentiation of affect and emotion has been problematic in the service setting (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Titz, 2008), and this has compelled some researchers to use the terms interchangeably. In this study, by "service emotions" we refer to the affective responses produced by one's perception of service attributes (Dube and Menon, 2000) or, put more simply, the feelings derived from the service encounter. Conceptually, there has been debate as to whether affective responses are the results of cognitive evaluative processes or antecedents to cognition (Zajonc and Markus, 1982), or even a hybrid concept that is situationally specific (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). This study embraces the cognitive-affect directional perspective, which seems to be the most applicable to business exchanges that imply a precedence of cognition by customers during the pre-purchase process.

Customer satisfaction

Traditionally, customer satisfaction is defined as an evaluation process in which the customer compares his or her prior expectation to the service (or perceived service) experienced (Gilbert *et al.*, 2004). This comparison of expectated and perceived service experienced is referred to as the disconfirmation model (Gilbert *et al.*, 2004). Recently, customer satisfaction has been noted to depend not only on customers' cognitive responses but also on their affective responses to service encounters (Edvardsson, 2005). This new development reflects a change in paradigm, from viewing customers as solely economic-rational decision makers to an integrated point of view that includes affect and emotions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The evaluation process, which leads to satisfaction levels, is now attributed to both cognition and affective responses to service encounters (Burns and Neisner, 2006). The current study embraces this new paradigm when conceptualizing customer satisfaction in a full-service restaurant setting.

Relationship quality

Of late, the effect of customer satisfaction on behavioral intentions has been noted to be mediated by customers' levels of trust in the service and/or service provider, and their commitment to the service provider (Ok *et al.*, 2005; Kim and Han, 2008). These two mediating variables are aspects of relationship quality (Ozdemir and Hewett, 2010; Ok *et al.*, 2005). Kim and Han (2008), working from the customers' perspective, refer to relationship quality as customers' perceptions of the relationship's efficacy in meeting their needs and goals. Hulten (2007) advocates for the development of a degree of relationship quality that can shift the customer- and service-provider interaction from a one-time transaction to a longer-term relationship. This study adopts and factors in the mediating role of trust and commitment in the satisfaction-behavioral intentions relationship. Trust is herein defined as the customer's belief in the reliability of the service provider to cater to him or her (Crosby *et al.*, 1990), resulting in the customer's sense of confidence (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Customer commitment in this study refers to a customer's desire to continue a positive, valued relationship with the service provider (Moorman *et al.*, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Behavioral intentions

Oliver (1997) referred to behavioral intentions as the stated likelihood to engage in a particular behavior. Behavioral intentions are considered to include revisit and word-of-mouth intentions (Han and Ryu, 2006; Han and Kim, 2009; Han *et al.*, 2009; Ok *et al.*, 2005) that can predict the future consumption behavior of the consumer and that of his or her word-of-mouth recipients. Other researchers have included an attitudinal component in behavioral intentions, which, if it is positive, can yield customer loyalty (Han and Ryu, 2009). When the behavioral components are favorable, which is the goal of service providers, customers positively affirm their likelihood to revisit the provider and then spread positive reviews to others with whom they are in contact. When the intention components are negative, the opposite customer behavior is likely to result. Such a valence in behavioral intentions implies an attitudinal component of likes and dislikes (Peter and Olson, 2003). Thus, when the valence is positive for both behavioral intentions, the customers' attitudes are positive towards the service provider and are likely to lead to loyalty toward the provider. It therefore suffices to use revisit and

word-of mouth intentions in place of loyalty in this study as the previous line of argument clearly equates loyalty to the positive combination of the two behavioral intention components.

Hypothesis development

In spite of the growing body of research on cognitive and affective consumer responses (e.g. Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999), research targeting such responses in service encounters, like those experienced in full service restaurants, seems to be lacking. The available literature tends to focus on other service industries like banking (Gil *et al.*, 2008; Varki and Colgate, 2001), retail (Burns and Neisner, 2006), educational services (Yu and Dean, 2001), health care (Choi *et al.*, 2004), and museums and parks (Bigne *et al.*, 2005). For instance, Gil *et al.* (2008), while researching the banking industry, noted service encounter performance to have a positive influence on the service value. They (Gil *et al.*, 2008) defined service value as a trade off between what is received from the service and what is sacrificed or given up in the course of acquiring or experiencing that service. Varki and Colgate (2001) noted that the price perceived by the customer significantly influenced perceived customer value, echoing the trade-off definition of Gil *et al.* (2008) and tallying with perceived value. Gil *et al.* (2008) argued that perceived value is inversely related to perceived price; in other words, they are negatively related. Since service value or perceived value is a macro concept that includes quality (Gil *et al.*, 2008) and might overlap with service quality, the adoption of perceived price in this study is justifiable. In extending this line of thinking, this study proposed and tested the following hypothesis:

H1. Service-encounter performance has a positive impact on perceived price.

Despite the apparent agreement on the evocation of customer affect during service encounters (e.g. Mano and Oliver, 1993; Mattila and Ro, 2008; Oliver, 1993), an explicit testing of the relationship is lacking. Oliver (1993), for instance, tested the effect of service attributes on customer affect response during the service and noted a significant effect. He (Oliver, 1993) employed two dimensions of affect (both positive and negative) that were experienced in an actual encounter. Since the actual affect experienced during a service encounter leads into affective evaluation (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Chaudhuri, 2005), which is consistent with the cognitive-affective perception adopted in this study, it is logical to extend the influence of service encounter performance to affect as affect is evaluative in nature. For testing this logic in the restaurant setting, the following hypothesis was employed:

H2. Service-encounter performance has a positive impact on affect.

The literature on the relationship between cognition and affective responses is still debating whether affect follows cognition (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999), is independent of cognition (Zajonc and Markus, 1982), or remains context dependant (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). Within the framework of functional and hedonic services (Kempf, 1999), restaurant services are likely to fall under the latter category, so it logically follows that restaurant services will generate more affective responses. Nevertheless, indications of differing affective responses can be deduced from the literature. For instance, Peter and Olson (2003, p. 42) describe four types of affective responses that include "emotions" such as intense bodily arousal, specific feelings and moods that are

in between emotion, and evaluation or attitude where evaluation is of a lower bodily arousal level. Since evaluation entails encoding that is conscious and cognitive (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Chaudhuri, 2005) while intense arousal is likely to involve physiological responses prior to evaluation (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999), it follows logically that evaluations are the consequence of cognition while emotions are non-cognitive. Of concern in this study is the evaluative affect that indicates the like-dislike, good-bad, favorable-unfavorable components (Peter and Olson, 2003) that comprise the appraisals leading to customer satisfaction. In order to test the cognitive-affective relationship in the full-service restaurant setting (which has yet to be considered in the literature), we proposed the following hypothesis:

H3. Perceived price has a positive impact on affect.

The influence of perceived price as a cognitive factor on customer satisfaction is still debatable. For instance, Varki and Colgate (2001), upon researching bank customers (who, according to Kempf (1999), lie within the functional-service realm), noted the cognitive factor to make a significant contribution to customer satisfaction. Contrary to Varki and Colgate (2001), Iglesias and Guillen (2004), utilizing data from restaurant customers, noted perceived price (a cognitive element) to be of lesser significance in contributing to customer satisfaction. However, in the restaurant context, Varki and Colgate (2001) find support from Han and Ryu (2009), albeit in limited form: Han and Ryu (2009) did not integrate affective response to customer satisfaction to further indicate the relative contribution of perceived price and affect to customers satisfaction. Ladhari *et al.* (2008), focusing on emotions in dining experiences, noted emotion to be a significant contributor to satisfaction. Faced with these conflicting findings of the relative effects of cognition and emotion on customer satisfaction, an integrative perspective of the two components is lacking in the restaurant setting. Such integration will serve in the affirmation of the different roles of cognition and affect in functional and hedonic services respectively. To test the effects of perceived price and affect in full-service restaurants, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H4. Perceived price has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

H5. Affect has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Relationship quality, including trust and commitment, has been evaluated differently by various researchers, with some having taken it to be an antecedent of overall satisfaction (Ok *et al.*, 2005), some giving trust and customer satisfaction an equal footing (Kim and Han, 2008), and others taking relationship quality and service quality together to be antecedents of behavioral intentions (Ozdemir and Hewett, 2010). Bove and Johnson (2001), on reviewing the literature, assert relationship quality to be a consequence of customer satisfaction as well as service encounter. This study adopted the Bove and Johnson (2001) posterior perception of relationship quality, which develops after the customer is served and is continuously altered with subsequent service encounters in a cumulative fashion (Halliday, 2004). This argument was subjected to empirical testing through the following hypothesis:

H6. Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on trust.

Customer commitment has suffered a conceptual misplacement in research when it has been viewed as an antecedent to satisfaction (Ok *et al.*, 2005) or has simply been left out of models. On this point, reference Morgan and Hunt's (1994) "ongoing" and "maintenance" definitional keywords, which imply the posteriori placement of commitment to customer satisfaction rather than its priority to satisfaction. Consequently, we proposed the following hypothesis to test the relationship:

H7. Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on commitment.

The desirable culminating effect of service encounters and customer satisfaction is the future behavior of customers, actions that can be predicted from their behavioral intentions. The relationship is noted to be mediated by the relationship-quality dimensions of trust and commitment (Canniere *et al.*, 2010). Research findings on the impact of trust and commitment on behavioral intentions are yet to be reconciled. Ok *et al.* (2005), on researching community services, noted trust to have no significant impact on behavioral intentions. To the contrary, Kim and Han (2008), using data from restaurant customers, found trust to have an impact on behavioral intentions. Since trust is a long-term orientation (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007) and forward looking in nature, then logically it can be asserted that trust will have an influence on the behavioral intentions of service customers. Thus, the following hypothesis was posited:

H8. Trust has a positive impact on behavioral intentions.

Customer commitment is noted to be central to relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) due to its attachment element towards the service provider (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Fullerton, 2005). While numerous works of research elucidate the positive impact of customers' commitment on their behavioral intentions, these studies have focused on other industries like community services (Ok *et al.*, 2005) and in different contexts like B2B environments (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007; Keh and Xie, 2009). With an eye toward replication, this study took on the relationship between commitment and behavioral intentions within the restaurant context. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H9. Commitment has a positive impact on behavioral intentions.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model. The model was developed based on a thorough review of the existing literature. Service encounters, perceived price, affect, customer satisfaction, and relationship quality (trust and commitment) were integrated into the model to explain the formation of behavioral intentions clearly.

Methods

Survey design

The constructs in this study were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale and multiple items. All measurement items validated in previous studies were borrowed and slightly modified to be adequate for the present study. For all measurement items across categories, scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In particular, service-encounter performance was measured by five items adopted from Mattila and Enz (2002) and Price *et al.* (1995). Perceived price was captured by two items borrowed from Oh (2000) and Kim *et al.* (2006). Affect was targeted with three items adopted from Oliver (1997), while customer satisfaction was operationalized

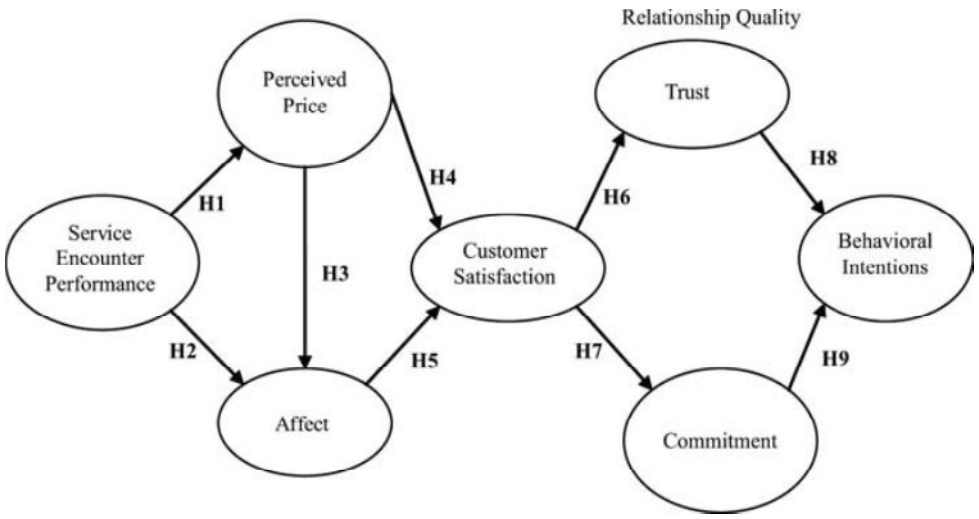


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

using three items from Garbarino and Johnson (1999) and Kim *et al.* (2006). Trust and commitment were measured by three items each drawn from Morgan and Hunt (1994). Lastly, the five items for behavioral intentions were adopted from Oliver (1997) and Maxham and Netemeyer (2002).

These modified items were thoroughly reviewed by academics (i.e. faculty members familiar with the subject and graduate students majoring in hospitality management) and industry professionals (i.e. restaurant managers and owners). Based on this experts' review, subtle refinement of the questionnaire was made (sentence structure for question clarity, reselection of words, editorial corrections, etc). As a next step, this preliminary questionnaire was pilot-tested with 40 full-service restaurant patrons. The results of the pilot-test verified that the questionnaire had an adequate level of reliability and validity. The finalized measurement scales used in this study are shown in Table I. The item reliability scores are above the desirable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) as presented in Table I.

Data-collection procedure and profile of the sample

A field survey was conducted at seven full-service restaurants. These restaurants were located in a metropolitan city in the USA. Full-service restaurants, which include a broad range of restaurants (e.g. family, casual, and upscale), provide waited table service for their patrons (Spears and Gregoire, 2006). According to Spears and Gregoire (2006), full-service restaurants are set apart by the fact that a wait-staff takes orders from and delivers food to customers, payment is made after the meal is consumed, and customers normally give tips to the wait-staff for its service. Individuals at these restaurants can experience not only food but also a relatively high level of services and customer-employee interaction (Han *et al.*, 2010; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002). That is, customers at full-service restaurants can evaluate both the functional outcomes of the service (i.e. the food itself) and detailed aspects of the service experience (Han *et al.*, 2010; Ladhari *et al.*, 2008). An alternative and informative classification of restaurants by Muller and Woods (1994) that uses brand/trade name and customer-decision variables to differentiate eateries was not used in this study as the study focus was on service encounter rather than customer decision *per se*. Initially, we contacted 40 randomly

Dimension	Items (loadings)	Cronbach's α
Service encounter performance	Interaction with staff is like interacting with friends (0.59) Staff pays special attention to my requests (0.74) Staff provides genuine services (0.90) Staff provides efficient and capable services (0.96) Staff's services meet my needs and expectations (0.81)	0.903
Perceived price	The food prices at this restaurant are reasonable (0.87) The price charged by this restaurant is appropriate as compared to any other restaurants (0.88)	0.866
Affect	I like this restaurant more than others (0.88) I feel better when I dine at this restaurant (0.88) I love eating at this restaurant (0.91)	0.921
Customer satisfaction	How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the quality of service? (0.87) How would you rate your overall satisfaction with this restaurant? (0.93) How would you rate this restaurant compared with other restaurants on overall satisfaction? (0.91)	0.928
Trust	I think this restaurant is reliable (0.87) I have confidence in this restaurant (0.90) I think this restaurant has high integrity (0.89)	0.931
Commitment	I am very committed to this restaurant (0.88) I intend to maintain a relationship definitely (0.94) I think this restaurant deserves my effort to maintain a relationship (0.92)	0.940
Behavioral intentions	I intend to continue visiting this restaurant (0.89) I consider this restaurant as my first choice (0.87) Even if another restaurant runs a special, I will still patronize this restaurant (0.89) I will spread positive word-of-mouth about this restaurant (0.89) I will recommend this restaurant to my friends and others (0.90)	0.952

Table I.
Refined final measures

chosen restaurants located in the busy downtown area of a metropolitan city with a list of full-service restaurants, eventually receiving permission to collect data from seven full-service restaurant operators. Restaurant customers had numerous alternatives available near each restaurant, meaning they could easily find similar types of food, service, and experience nearby. Only restaurant patrons who agreed to participate in the survey were given the questionnaire, which was presented after they had finished their main entrée. Survey participants were requested to evaluate measurement items based on their dining experience and to place the completed questionnaires on the table when they left. A total of 500 survey questionnaires were delivered to restaurant patrons at these restaurants. From these, 305 complete questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 61.0 percent.

Descriptive statistics for the sample in the present research indicated that about 42.5 percent were male and 57.5 percent female, providing a nearly gender-balanced sample. Approximately 65.1 percent of the sample was Caucasian/white in origin with the

remainder representing other ethnic groups. Particularly, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and others accounted for 17.4 percent, 9.7 percent, 7.0 percent, and 0.7 percent of the sample, respectively. Of those indicating their annual income ($n = 110$), 43 percent reported less than $25,000 per annum with the balance indicating more than $25,000 annually.

Analytical methods

The present study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive and inferential analyses (e.g. sampling profile, correlation). To test the proposed relationships among the study variables, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using the AMOS 5 program. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), construct validity was assessed by running a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) before testing the hypothesized paths using the SEM. The mediating roles of satisfaction, trust, and commitment were tested by examining the direct and indirect effects of these constructs' predictors on intentions.

Results

Measurement model

The measurement model relates the observed and unobserved variables that justify the use of the latter in estimating the former (Byrne, 2010). The estimation of the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a prerequisite in validating the structural model that is of interest in a piece of research. Upon subjection of the measurement items to CFA (see Table II), the chi-square value (χ^2) of 606.654 ($df = 227$, $p < 0.001$) was obtained, indicating the goodness-of-fit. Furthermore, the χ^2/df ratio was 2.673, which enhances the acceptability of the model as it is within the acceptable range of 2 to 5 (Marsh and Hocevar, 1988). Other fit parameters (see Table II) of the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.952) and normed fit index (NFI = 0.926), as well as the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA = 0.075), enhance the reliability of the model as they satisfy the minimum requirements.

Structural model analysis

SEM was used to asses the conceptualized model and thus the proposed hypotheses. The Chi-square value for the conceptual model was $\chi^2 = 901.794$ ($df = 234$, $p < 0.001$) with RMSEA = .096, CFI = .916, and NFI = .890. Though the Chi-square χ^2 indicates the model to be suitable, the other model fit variables (RMSEA, CFI, and NFI) are below their acceptable levels (see Byrne, 2010). Upon comparison with the alternative model that included other paths (SEP → CS, AF → BI, and TR → CO), the Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 657.335$, $df = 236$, $p < 0.001$) and other model fit variables (Table III) indicate that the alternative model fits better than the originally proposed model. When the original model is compared with the new one, a significant difference is observed ($\Delta\chi^2 = 244.459$, $p < 0.001$). Of the nine hypotheses, three were not supported (i.e. *H4*, *H7*, and *H8*), as indicated in Table III.

The new model is presented in Figure 2. As hypothesized, service-encounter performance does influence perceived price and affect (*H1* and *H2* respectively). Service-encounter performance explained 26.90 percent of the variation in perceived price while service-encounter performance and perceived price together explain 52.60 percent of the variations in affect (see Table III for R^2's). Moreover, the new model

Table II.
Results of the measurement model ($n = 301$)

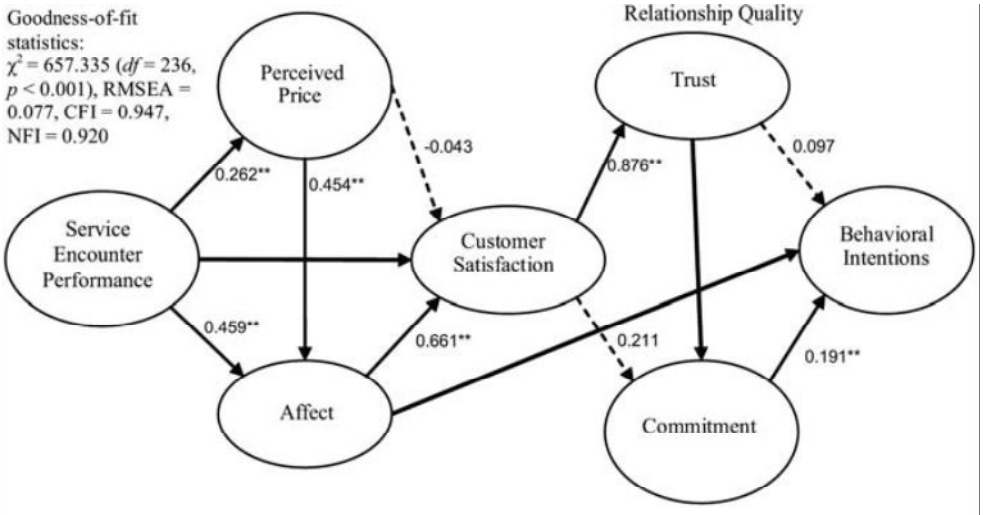
Variables	SE		PP		AF		CS		TR		CO		BI
SEP	*0.657*		–		–		–		–		–		–
PP	0.257	(0.066)	*0.766*		–		–		–		–		–
AF	0.533	(0.284)	0.497	(0.247)	*0.792*		–		–		–		–
CS	0.685	(0.469)	0.373	(0.139)	0.769	(0.591)	*0.817*		–		–		–
TR	0.681	(0.464)	0.356	(0.127)	0.673	(0.453)	0.776	(0.602)	*0.786*		–		–
CO	0.604	(0.365)	0.323	(0.104)	0.625	(0.391)	0.649	(0.421)	0.706	(0.498)	*0.835*		–
BI	0.540	(0.292)	0.507	(0.257)	0.851	(0.724)	0.813	(0.661)	0.719	(0.517)	0.702	(0.493)	*0.789*
Mean	5.201		5.324		5.313		5.543		5.512		4.665		5.448
SD	1.257		1.320		1.418		1.143		1.251		1.573		1.417
Composite reliability	0.903		0.867		0.920		0.930		0.917		0.938		0.949

Notes: SEP = Service encounter performance; PP = Perceived price; AF = Affect; CS = Customer satisfaction; TR = Trust; CO = Commitment; BI = Behavioral intentions; All correlations were significant at 0.01 level; Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 606.654$ ($df = 227$, $p < 0.001$), RMSEA = 0.075, CFI = 0.952, NFI = 0.926; The average variance extracted is on diagonal, and the squared correlations are in parentheses below the diagonal

		Standardized estimate	*t*-value	Result
Hypothesized path				
H1: SEP → PP		0.262	4.114*	Supported
H2: SEP → AF		0.459	8.828*	Supported
H3: PP → AF		0.454	8.429*	Supported
H4: PP → CS		−0.043	−1.042	Not supported
H5: AF → CS		0.661	12.021*	Supported
H6: CS → TR		0.876	16.302*	Supported
H7: CS → CO		0.211	1.833	Not supported
H8: TR → BI		0.097	1.580	Not supported
H9: CO → BI		0.191	4.054*	Supported
Added paths				
SE → CS		0.388	8.881*	
AF → BI		0.734	13.518*	
TR → CO		0.587	4.895*	
R^2 (PP)	0.269			
R^2 (AF)	0.526			
R^2 (CS)	0.844			
R^2 (TR)	0.767			
R^2 (CO)	0.606			
R^2 (BI)	0.897			
Goodness-of-fit statistics:	$\chi^2 = 657.335$ ($df = 236$, $p < 0.001$), RMSEA = 0.077, CFI = 0.947, NFI = 0.920			

Notes: SEP = Service encounter performance; PP = Perceived price; AF = Affect; CS = Customer satisfaction; TR = Trust; CO = Commitment; BI = Behavioral intentions; Goodness-of-fit statistics for the original model without the added paths was not satisfactory ($\chi^2 = 901.794$ ($df = 239$, $p < 0.001$), RMSEA = 0.096, CFI = 0.916, NFI = 0.890); The model was significantly improved by adding three paths ($\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 244.459, $p < 0.001$); *$p < 0.01$

Table III.
Structure parameter estimates ($n = 301$)



Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; Dotted lines indicate insignificant paths; Bolded lines indicate newly added paths

Figure 2.
Results of the structural model

reveals service encounter performance to have an effect on customer satisfaction directly. The hypothesized impact of perceived price on customer satisfaction (*H4*) is not supported, suggesting its effect to be fully mediated by affect (*H5*).

The contribution of customer satisfaction on the dimensions of relationship quality is partially supported: its effect on trust (*H6*) is statistically significant while its effect on commitment (*H7*) is rejected. Nevertheless, a new path from trust to commitment is introduced that positions trust as a mediator. For the effect of relationship quality on behavioral intentions, only commitment (*H9*) indicates a significant effect while trust (*H8*) does not. This indicates commitment to be a mediator for the effects of other variables on behavioral intentions. A new path from affect to behavioral intention is included as a result of model fitting.

Indirect effects

To further ascertain the effect of some variables on others, indirect effects were tested. The results are presented in Table IV. Sobel (1987) indicates the importance of ascertaining these indirect effects. All three paths that were not supported in this study (PP → CS, CS → CO, and TR → BI) do appear to be significant upon appraisal of their indirect effects, indicating the causation variable to be fully mediated by other variables.

Discussion and implications

Summary of the study

The study aimed to determine the factors that influence customer behavioral intentions in a full-service restaurant setting. The proposed model included service-encounter performance, perceived price, affect, customer satisfaction, relationship quality (trust and commitment), and behavioral intentions. Through SEM analysis, the model was revised, with three paths added and three discarded. With the significances noted in the paths and the higher explanatory power of the resulting model ($R^2 = 0.897$), the model proves itself applicable to full-service restaurants.

Implications

The results from this study offer both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, three implications are derived from the study results. First, customer affect in full-service restaurants is more strongly influenced by the service-encounter performance as compared to by perceived price, and also has an influence on customer satisfaction. The non-significant influence of perceived price on customer satisfaction but not on affect implies affect to be a full mediator for perceived price on customer

Effect of	AF	CS	TR	CO	BI
Service encounter performance	0.119*	0.371**	0.664**	0.550**	0.594**
Perceived price	–	*0.300***	0.225**	0.186**	0.391**
Affect	–	–	0.579**	0.479**	0.148*
Customer satisfaction	–	–	–	*0.514***	0.224**
Trust	–	–	–	–	*0.112**

Table IV.
Standardized indirect effects ($n = 301$)

Notes: AF = Affect; CS = Customer satisfaction; TR = Trust; CO = Commitment; BI = Behavioral intentions; Italicized values explain the insignificant paths (i.e. PP → CS; CS → CO; TR → BI); *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

satisfaction; such finding complements that of Kincaid *et al.* (2010) who noted affect to be a partial mediator for tangibles (that can be considered as cognitive component) on restaurant customer satisfaction. Thus it suffices to conclude that a full-service restaurant service-encounter performance is primarily affective in nature (Titz, 2008). Second, the addition of a direct path from service-encounter performance to customer satisfaction implies customer satisfaction is not only a direct dependent of affect but also the service encounter performance. Third, trust – a component of relationship quality – is a perfect mediator for the influence of customer satisfaction on commitment, which is the other relationship quality component (Ok *et al.*, 2005) that acts as a perfect mediator for trust on behavioral intentions.

Findings from this study provide several practical implications for full-service restaurateurs. The significant influence of service-encounter performance on perceived price, affect and customer satisfaction implies restaurateurs should direct their attention to the manner in which their service is provided. This implication sheds light on the means of providing service through staff interactions that should be friendly, attentive, genuine, and efficient while simultaneously meeting customers' needs and expectations. In creating a favorable perceived price, restaurateurs can use comparative marketing strategies that will lead customers to perceive the restaurant's food prices as reasonable and appropriate compared to other restaurants'. These comparison strategies can implicitly focus on other restaurants as well as on the creation of the impression that what is offered, relative to the price, is reasonable. Through managing the service-encounter performance and perceived price, restaurateurs are assured of creating a positive affect in customers that entails appreciation, an improved mood in the restaurant, and affinity for eating in that restaurant. Moreover, the appropriate management and oversight of service-encounter performance, perceived price, and affect will likely lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction.

The interplay of the relationship-quality components between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in full-service restaurants offers a practical implication to restaurateurs. The full mediation of trust on the customer satisfaction on commitment implies restaurateurs, by enhancing customer satisfaction can create a sense of reliability, confidence, and integrity with respect to the restaurant's service, all of which are elements of trust. Consequently, upon enhancing customer satisfaction and trust, the restaurateur is likely to create a higher customer commitment that will have an impact on the behavioral intentions of both revisiting the restaurant and recommending the restaurant to potential customers.

The managerial importance of affect on behavioral intentions via the customer-satisfaction path is amplified by its direct impact on the behavioral intentions of customers. This typically reflects the affective nature of restaurant services (Lashley, 2008). This has normative implications to managers in that they are urged to enhance their restaurants' affective component to boost not only customer satisfaction but also customers' future behavioral intentions. The enhancement of affect can be attained through properly managing the interaction between service providers and customers during service encounters. As mentioned previously, managers should ensure that service employees are providing service in a friendly and efficient manner, as well as attending to customers' wishes and requests. Some aspects of human-resource management like employee selection, training, motivation, and autonomy in service provision can equip service employees to manage service more appropriately and effectively.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations that give room for further empirical inquiry. Methodologically, the data were collected in the USA, a setting that might not reflect restaurant customers' behavior in a different cultural milieu. The sampling of metropolitan restaurants and use of responses obtained from only willing participants might constitute a limitation against generalization as the restaurant location and body of respondents might have differed from the general populations of restaurants and patrons respectively. Moreover, data were collected from full-service restaurants that include a broad range of restaurants (Han *et al.*, 2010), thus hindering generalization to the restaurant spectrum as a whole. It would be true that food types and restaurant size can have an influence on the proposed relationships. Thus, for future research, it would be desirable to replicate the proposed relationships in the specific categories of full-service restaurants and other types of restaurants (quick-service, buffet, fast-casual, etc.) considering the types of food each provided and the size of each. Conceptually, some of the constructs in the model, like commitment, have been examined from a different perspective by some researchers (e.g. Fullerton, 2005). Customer commitment has been categorized into affect and continuance (Fullerton, 2005), and these categories have been noted to have a differential impact on behavioral intentions. Thus, further studies that consider commitment in its many dimensions can shed further light on the construct. Future studies can also associate service-encounter performance with other non-cognitive constructs like arousal and mood and elucidate their impact on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Studies that make observations and inquiries into customer affect and satisfaction during the actual service encounter (in contrast to this study) could yield more insight into their relationships. Lastly, adopting a longitudinal study tracing the impact of the constructs on behavioral intentions is justified by the fact that behavioral intentions are futuristic in nature and liable to change over time, unlike their relatively static antecedents.

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