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Structural Equation Modeling to Construct Customer Behavioral Intentions in Japanese-Style Yakiniku Restaurants: A Case Study of the Umai Chain Brand †

Chih-Wei Lin [1,2], Wen-Goang Yang [1], Wei-Yeng Sia [2], Yi-Ling Liu [1], Yu-Sheng Lin [3,4,*] and Chen-Hsiang Hsieh [2,*]

[1] Department of Leisure Service Management, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung 413310, Taiwan; cwlin@cyut.edu.tw (C.-W.L.); wayne@cyut.edu.tw (W.-G.Y.); a25773131@yahoo.com.tw (Y.-L.L.)
[2] Department of Business Administration, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung 413310, Taiwan; wyc147@gmail.com
[3] General Education Center, Chaoyang University of Technology Taichung, Taichung 411030, Taiwan
[4] Department of Industrial Education and Technology, National Changhua University of Education, Changhua 500207, Taiwan
* Correspondence: lin3117@cyut.edu.tw (Y.-S.L.); teisho2012@gmail.com (C.-H.H.); Tel.: +886-4-23323000 (ext. 3069) (Y.-S.L.)
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Abstract: By constructing a linear structural equation model, we explored the impact of the customer service, food quality, and physical environment on customer behavioral intentions with experiential value and customer satisfaction as mediators. We focused on customers of the renowned Taiwanese franchised restaurant, Umai Yakiniku, in the Taichung area, Taiwan, and its services. Through customer perception and experience, we unraveled the subsequent behavioral dynamics. A total of 337 valid questionnaires were collected through purposive sampling. The participants encompassed customers who had previously dined at the Umai Yakiniku restaurant, excluding those attending corporate events. The overall behavioral model of customers showed a satisfactory level of fit. The customer service, food quality, and physical environment significantly impacted the experiential value. Customer service directly impacted customer satisfaction, while food quality and the physical environment indirectly affected customer satisfaction. Experiential value positively impacted customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction positively affected behavioral intentions. Such findings provide information for related companies and their strategic management.

Keywords: perceived value; experiential value; customer satisfaction

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1. Introduction

The Taiwanese catering market is highly competitive with a strong emphasis on service quality. In the intense competition, restaurant operators need to provide personalized products or services tailored to consumer preferences to increase the chances of success [1]. As consumer awareness rises, the solitary and competitive business approach is gradually losing its appeal in the food and beverage industry as a trend of mainstream culinary culture. According to Xiao [2], the dining experience for today's customers has shifted from satisfying physiological needs to seeking higher levels of gratification. Elements such as the taste of the food, distinctive features, interior design, and ambient atmosphere in restaurants have become increasingly crucial. In order to address the challenges of competition and service, the industry's success needs to be connected to distinctive and culinary offerings, or locational advantages, to secure consumers. However, it is needed to achieve efficiency and service excellence.

According to a report by ET, nine out of the top ten Japanese barbecue restaurants in Taichung are franchised. The characteristic of franchised restaurants lies in their ability to

acquire the Know-How of operations. Ninemeier [3] pointed out that franchised restaurants are food service organizations formed by corporate entities, encompassing the adoption of a standardized menu, joint procurement of raw materials and equipment, and the use of consistent operational management. These practices are then transformed into standard operating procedures for each restaurant, contributing to the high operational quality observed.

In this research, Uma Yakiniku, a chain barbecue restaurant, was explored as it operates under a unified company philosophy, comprehensive procurement of raw materials and equipment, and a consistent management operating model as the top chain barbecue restaurant in Taichung. Based on previous research, the personnel service, food quality, and physical environment, and the relationship between value and customer satisfaction, were explored. The essence of experiential marketing lies in the consumer's experience, as consumers are influenced by both rational and emotional factors. Therefore, the shaping of the "consumer context" is deemed crucial in this context. Li [4] found that customer satisfaction significantly influenced customer loyalty and behavioral intention.

This research was conducted to (1) understand the current status of the personnel service, food quality, physical environment, experiential value, customer satisfaction, and behavior intention; (2) explore the impact of the personnel service, food quality, and physical environment on experiential value; (3) explore the impact of the personnel service, food quality, and physical environment on customer satisfaction; (4) explore the impact of experiential value on customer satisfaction; and (5) explore the impact of customer satisfaction on behavioral intent.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Perceived Quality

Liu [5] and Chen [6] posited that perceived quality is a factor directly evaluated by customers through their five senses. The five senses of sensory experience refer to visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile pressure perceptions. For customers, the perceived quality of a restaurant extends beyond the quality of its food, encompassing service quality and the overall physical environment of the establishment. We asserted that restaurant quality must encompass the service quality of personnel, the food quality of the dishes, and the physical environment of the restaurant, elaborated as follows.

2.1.1. Personnel Service Quality

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [7] proposed that service quality is assessed by the perceived service performance by customers. Service quality depends on the customer's satisfaction with the service, representing the comparison between customer expectations and the perceived service and indicating that service outcomes meet the established standards [8,9].

2.1.2. Food Quality

Liu [5] suggested that factors judged by consumers including their senses, such as color, flavor, cooking, hygiene, and others, constitute food quality. Wu [6] mentioned that quality aspects are judged through the senses, including hygiene, price, taste, nutrition, calorie content, portion size, packaging, freshness, utensil quality, and dish presentation.

2.1.3. Physical Environment

Belk [10] claimed that the physical environment refers to visible physical characteristics such as the geographical location, decor, sound, atmosphere, and visible appearance of commodities. Bitner, Barnes, and Ward [11] argued that information about the physical environment influences consumers' perceptions of service providers, impacting their consumption behavior. The physical environment combines different elements into a whole [12], and different types of restaurants have corresponding elements. Thus, we defined the physical environment as tangible or intangible entities visible or perceptible to customers.

2.2. Experiential Value

2.2.1. Definition of Experiential Value

In relationship marketing, value is a pivotal factor. According to Ravald and Grönroos [13], the ability of companies to provide exceptional value was considered one of the most successful strategies of the 1990s. Value is a motivator influencing contemporary consumer purchasing behavior and a fundamental basis for consumer purchasing decisions [14,15]. Experiential value encompasses sensory experiences such as emotions, touch, taste, and smell. It allows customers to perceive and form impressions of products or services [16]. Therefore, we defined experiential value as the recognition, preference, and satisfaction generated by customers through sensory experiences.

2.2.2. Measurement of Experiential Value

Holbrook [17] proposed that value is categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic value, along with an activity dimension in a value theory framework. Holbrook suggested that the value theory framework includes (1) Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Value, (2) Self-oriented versus Other-oriented Value, and (3) Active versus Reactive Value. These three combinations intertwine, resulting in a framework comprising eight forms. Due to the complexity of Holbrook's value theory, Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon [18] simplified the framework and introduced the term "experiential value." They defined experiential value as a relative preference developed by individuals during the experiential process with products or services, subsequently enhancing or diminishing the consumption value attributed to products or services. Experiential value is categorized into Consumer Return on Investment, Service Excellence, Aesthetics, and Playfulness.

- Aesthetics: Overall sensory attractiveness of specific visual elements to consumers.
- Playfulness: The intrinsic psychological feelings and enjoyment are generated when consumers participate in activities.
- Consumer Return on Investment (ROI): The rewards obtained by consumers concerning financial and time costs and behavioral input.
- Excellent Service: Consumers' self-directed responses to market service efficiency and marketing capabilities.

2.3. Satisfaction

Spreng, MacKenzie, and Olshavsky [19] stated that the sensation of satisfaction arises from customers comparing the performance of a service or product with their internal expectations for that service or product. If the performance of the product or service exceeds the consumer's expectations, then the customer experiences satisfaction. Satisfaction is the psychological state of an individual after the experience of a product or service and is influenced by various social and psychological factors [20]. Therefore, we defined satisfaction as the overall assessment by customers after receiving the products or services of the restaurant.

2.4. Behavior Intention

Behavioral intention is the degree to which an individual expresses the intention or inclination to engage in a specific behavior before making a decision [21]. In other words, the stronger the willingness to engage in a particular behavior, the more likely the individual is to perform that behavior. Behavioral intention encompasses a willingness to recommend to others, loyalty to the product or company, willingness to speak positively about the product or company, willingness to continue purchasing, and willingness to pay a higher price [22]. Therefore, we defined behavioral intention as the willingness of customers to continue dining at the restaurant.

2.5. Perceived Quality, Experiential Value, Customer Satisfaction, and Behavior Intention

Wu [23] found that in the exploration of customer behavior in restaurants, service personnel impact experiential value, especially the interaction between service personnel

and customers, which proves beneficial for experiential value and the emotions of the customers. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses.

- H1: Perceived quality has a significantly positive impact on experiential value.
- H1-1: Personnel service has a significantly positive impact on experiential value.
- H1-2: Food quality has a significantly positive impact on experiential value.
- H1-3: The physical environment has a significantly positive impact on experiential value.

Liu [24] explored the relationships between the service quality, food quality, environmental atmosphere, consumer satisfaction, and consumer loyalty. He revealed a positive correlation among the service quality, food quality, environmental atmosphere, consumer satisfaction, and consumer loyalty. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- H2: Perceived quality has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction.
- H2-1: Perceived personnel service has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction.
- H2-2: Perceived food quality has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction.
- H2-3: The perceived physical environment has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction.

In the study conducted by Chen, Hu, and Lin [25] on tourists, it was found that experiential quality affects their experiential value. Furthermore, experiential value influences satisfaction, and ultimately, satisfaction affects loyalty. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- H3: Experiential value has a significantly positive impact on customer satisfaction.
- H4: Customer satisfaction has a significantly positive impact on behavior intention.

3. Research Method

We adopted a purposive sampling method. The participants were customers who patronized the Uma Yakiniku restaurant in the Taichung area and those who visited in the past six months. Those who participated in corporate gatherings were excluded. An online survey was conducted by using Google Forms. All questions were mandatory to answer to avoid any instances of unanswered questions. The official survey was performed online from 1 March to 31 March 2020. A total of 350 responses were collected. After excluding invalid ones, 337 valid responses were obtained with a response rate of 96%.

The questionnaire for this study comprised five sections. The first section covers personal demographic information, and the second section comprises three dimensions of perceived quality: "Personnel Service Quality", "Food Quality", and "Physical Environment". The third section included experiential value, the fourth section included customer satisfaction, and the fifth section included behavior intention. Except for the personal demographic information, the remaining four scales use a Likert five-point scoring system. The content of the questionnaire was created referring to previous study results. After the questionnaire was modified, it was finalized and distributed.

An item analysis was conducted using the correlation with the total score and critical ratio (CR) for item selection. Retaining items showed a CR value greater than 3 and a correlation coefficient above 0.30 at a significant level [26]. The top and bottom 27% in scores were classified in the extreme group. The top 27% were designated in the high-score group, and the bottom 27% in the low-score group. T-tests were then conducted for each factor item between the high- and low-score groups. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 21 and Amos 21 including descriptive statistics, a confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

The males comprised 42.9% of the respondents, while the females accounted for 57.1%. A total of 13.3% were 20–30 years old, and 57.9% were 41 years old and above. In total, 18.4% earned NTD 22,001–32,000 (least), and 28.5% earned NTD 52,001 and more. A total

of 69% were military/civil servants and students. In total, 38.4% visited the restaurant for friends/colleagues/family gatherings, and 2.3% visited for marketing events.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Amos 21 was used to test the normality of the data, and CFA was used to test whether the measurement tools were appropriate for the research matrix and facets. The reliability and validity were tested for convergent validity, discriminant validity, item reliability, and composite reliability. The standard CR must be above 0.7 [27], and the standard value of the average must be greater than 0.5 [28]. The scale of the customer behavior in this study showed reliability and validity as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity for customer behavior.

Variables	Item	Factor Loading	CR	Average
Personnel Service	PS 1	0.83	0.895	0.681
	PS 2	0.86		
	PS 3	0.82		
	PS 4	0.79		
Food Quality	FQ 1	0.81	0.899	0.641
	FQ 2	0.75		
	FQ 3	0.81		
	FQ 4	0.83		
	FQ 5	0.80		
Physical Environment	PE 1	0.81	0.877	0.641
	PE 2	0.82		
	PE 3	0.76		
	PE4	0.81		
Experiential Value	Consumer Return on Investment	0.72	0.840	0.568
	Aesthetics	0.83		
	Playfulness	0.73		
	Service Excellence	0.73		
Customer Satisfaction	CS 1	0.69	0.877	0.589
	CS 2	0.77		
	CS 3	0.81		
	CS 4	0.76		
	CS 5	0.80		
Behavior Intention	BI 1	0.91	0.921	0.746
	BI 2	0.95		
	BI 3	0.74		
	BI 4	0.84		

Discriminant Validity Test

Pearson correlation analysis results showed that all variables were significantly correlated, and the coefficient values ranged from 0.462 to 0.865. When using the confidence interval method, the interval that is not 1 indicates a complete correlation between the variables and discriminant validity. In this research, a bootstrapping method was used at a confidence level of below 95%. Estimates were measured using the bias-corrected and percentile methods. The correlation coefficient between variables revealed that the upper bound of the confidence interval was between 0.607 and 0.981, and the lower bound was between 0.437 and 0.949. The result indicated no complete correlation between the dimensions of the behavioral model. Therefore, each variable demonstrated discrimination (Table 2).

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

	Personnel Service	Food Quality	Physical Environment	Consumer Return on Investment	Aesthetics	Playfulness	Service Excellence	Customer Satisfaction
Personnel service								
Food quality	0.641 *							
Physical environment	0.520 *	0.691 *						
Consumer return on investment	0.462 *	0.661 *	0.670 *					
Aesthetics	0.589 *	0.695 *	0.814 *	0.756 *				
Playfulness	0.555 *	0.675 *	0.731 *	0.703 *	0.852 *			
Service excellence	0.621 *	0.692 *	0.716 *	0.709 *	0.836 *	0.818 *		
Customer satisfaction	0.667 *	0.745 *	0.780 *	0.715 *	0.865 *	0.822 *	0.857 *	
Behavior intention	0.487 *	0.669 *	0.665 *	0.723 *	0.725 *	0.730 *	0.733 *	0.734 *

(* $p < 0.05$).

We constructed the behavioral model of Uma Yakiniku customers based on previous research. The analysis was conducted using AMOS 21. In the normality test, although the sample data conformed to the single variance normality, the CR of the multivariate kurtosis was 54.368, which did not conform to the normal distribution. In order to correct the over-inflated chi-square value caused by non-multivariate normality, we used the Bollen and Stine [29] Bootstrap method for modification (Table 3).

Table 3. Model fit of Overall behavior mode.

Indicators	Criteria	Model Fit	
		Original Fit	Adjusted by Bootstrap
REMSEA	<0.08	0.97	0.10
GFI	>0.80	0.789	0.965
AGFI	>0.80	0.746	0.956
NFI	>0.90	0.861	0.965
RFI	>0.90	0.845	0.961
IFI	>0.90	0.891	0.999
TLI/NFI	>0.90	0.878	0.999
CFI	>0.90	0.890	0.999
CN	>200	93	325.449
NC	$1 < x^2/DF < 3$	4.145	1.036

The chi-square value of the original model was 1206.202. The chi-square value revised by the bootstrap was 301.510. The original sample data of this study did not have over-inflated chi-square values; therefore, we used the modified chi-square to test each indicator. The overall behavioral model detection values of the customers met the standard, and the model of this study was acceptable.

The model must meet the following items: (1) all error variations are positive and no negative numbers appear; (2) all error variations are significant; (3) there is standardized regression estimation, and the model is analyzed if the value does not exceed 0.95; (4) there are no excessively large standard errors [30]. The behavioral model in this study met the four conditions recommended in Ref. The model did not differ from the estimation, so the analysis was carried out (Table 4).

Table 4. Hypothesis verification.

Hypothesis	Path		Path Coefficient	S.E.	t	Remarks
H1-1	P.S.	→E.V.	0.243	0.048	4.74 *	Support
H1-2	F.Q.	→E.V.	0.316	0.063	5.21 *	Support
H1-3	P.E.	→E.V.	0.764	0.056	11.89 *	Support
H2-1	P.S.	→C.S.	0.152	0.031	3.46 *	Support
H2-2	F.Q.	→C.S.	0.095	0.040	1.88	Not Support
H2-3	P.E.	→C.S.	0.072	0.050	0.96	Not Support
H3	E.V.	→E.V.	0.830	0.064	9.72 *	Support
H4	C.S.	→B.I.	0.0703	0.080	13.82 *	Support

* $p < 0.05$.

The standardized coefficient of personnel service on experiential value was 0.243, and the t-value was 4.739. The standardized coefficient of food quality on experience value was 0.316, and the t-value was 5.210. The standardized coefficient of the physical environment on experience value was 0.764, and the t-value was 11.892. The standardized coefficient of personnel service on experience value was 0.152, and the t-value was 3.463. The standardized coefficient of experience value on customer satisfaction was 0.830, and the t-value was 9.720. The standardized coefficient of customer satisfaction on behavioral intention was 0.703, and the t-value was 13.822. The result confirmed the significance of the model. Therefore, the first five items were confirmed.

The standardized coefficient of personnel service on experience value was 0.095, and the t-value was 1.882. The standardized coefficient of personnel service on experience value was 0.072, and the t-value was 0.95. Personnel service did not meet the significant standard. The behavior model path analysis is shown in Figure 1.

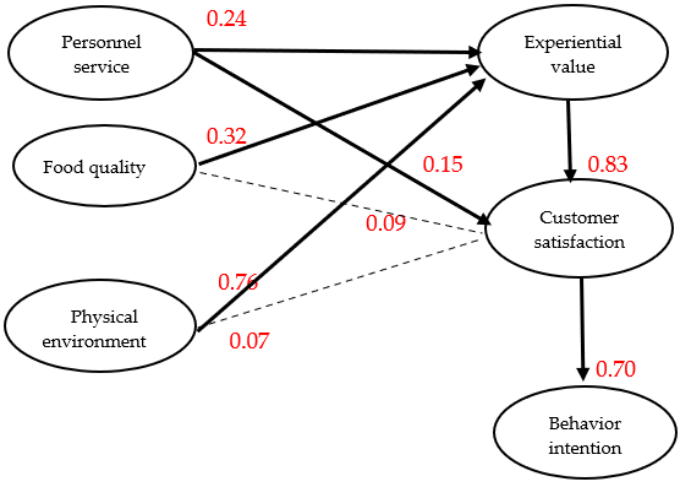


Figure 1. Path analysis of overall behavior model.

In the customer behavior model of the Uma Yakiniku restaurant, the personnel service, food quality, and physical environment positively impacted experiential value. Notably, the impact of the physical environment on experiential value (0.76) was the most substantial, indicating that the restaurant's ambient atmosphere was a primary factor influencing the dining experience. For customer satisfaction, only personnel service was significant (0.16). Although food quality and the physical environment did not impact customer satisfaction, food quality and the physical environment indirectly influenced customer satisfaction through experiential value. Experiential value impacted customer satisfaction (0.83), and customer satisfaction also impacted behavior intention (0.68).

The current food service industry demands experiential marketing. Experiential value is a dynamic experience of satisfaction for lasting memories. These memories encom-

pass the value perceptions before and after visiting [31]. Customer satisfaction is the consumer experience after the consumption of a product or service. Experiential value influences customer satisfaction before and after visiting. Customer behavior is influenced by the "value approach," where satisfaction influences behavioral intent. This aligns with Thompson's [32] results, emphasizing the linkage between customer satisfaction and value to drive purchase behavior and loyalty.

5. Conclusions

We found that the personnel service, food quality, and physical environment impacted experiential value. The impact of the physical environment on experiential value was the most significant. This implied that the restaurant's ambiance influenced the dining experience at Uma Yakiniku. Personnel service significantly impacted customer satisfaction. The performance of the service staff affected customers' satisfaction. While food quality and the physical environment did not directly influence customer satisfaction, they affected experiential value. Experiential value impacted customer satisfaction. This underscored the importance of the dining experience at Uma Yakiniku in customer satisfaction. Customers felt enthusiasm for the service provided by Uma Yakiniku, which was a favored choice. Customer satisfaction influenced behavioral intentions. Despite the higher pricing at Uma Yakiniku, the superior service quality and dishes attracted customers, leading them to express the intention to revisit for dining.

Based on the research results, the following recommendations are proposed for the operations and management of restaurants.

According to the analysis of the overall behavior model, the impact of the physical environment on the experiential value is the most significant. Especially in the competitive landscape of numerous shabu-shabu restaurants in Taichung, the key to attracting customer attention is in the hardware such as the unique design of the restaurant's exterior and thoughtful arrangement of tables and chairs. Personnel services impact customer satisfaction. However, customers scored lower in terms of attention to information related to the restaurant. The main reason was the relatively low interaction between the restaurant and customers, resulting in fewer opportunities for customers to learn about restaurant-related activities. Enhanced on-the-job training can simultaneously be achieved by (1) strengthening future-oriented, sustainable, and relationship-maintaining customer relationships, (2) transitioning from a product–service orientation to an experiential marketing orientation, (3) allowing customers to experience the refined Japanese shabu-shabu dining mode as a genuine source of profit for the restaurant, and (4) continuous innovation in product offerings and dining modes. Then, a high-end consumer base can be secured, thereby increasing market differentiation and positioning the restaurant as a leader beyond price limitations in the market.

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