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A Holistic Approach to Customer Journey Management: Driving Satisfaction and Competitive Advantage in Tourism

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop and propose a holistic, stage-based conceptual framework for Customer Journey Management, addressing a critical gap in the literature that lacks a diagnostic and strategic tool to analyze the full journey across all phases, particularly within the tourism sector. Using a conceptual modeling approach grounded in a systematic literature review, the study synthesizes existing theories, Service-Dominant Logic and Customer Experience Theory, to propose a new theoretical-practical model (The Pyramid Model) and a measurement tool (Questionnaire/Grid). The framework integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions across the pre-, during-, and post-consumption stages. A comprehensive Questionnaire/Grid systematically maps and measures the impact of critical touchpoints on customer outcomes such as satisfaction and consumer delight. The model pioneers a quantifiable diagnostic tool that translates theory into managerial action, offering service managers a clear methodology to audit journeys, allocate resources, and drive customer delight and sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: customer journey; customer experience theory; customer satisfaction; customer engagement; service-dominant logic

1. Introduction

The global tourism industry faces a myriad of challenges, including diverse consumer demands and pressures to adapt sustainability measures, which require business owners to improve their understanding of their customer journey. The customer journey spans all interactions between a customer and a brand, evolving dynamically across multiple touchpoints and channels over time (Abid et al., 2025; De Keyser et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Zheng & Li, 2024). Rather than viewing these as an ad hoc sequence of discrete transactions, the customer journey might be viewed as an evolving construct, experienced as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by multiple interconnected touchpoints (Abid et al., 2025; Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; De Keyser et al., 2020). To create value and differentiation, firms must adopt a comprehensive approach to managing this journey (Abid et al., 2025). Despite substantial conceptual progress in customer journey research, the literature still offers limited stage-based diagnostic instruments that can systematically capture how customer experiences unfold across touchpoints and over time, particularly in hospitality and tourism settings.

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Effective management enables firms to anticipate evolving needs, adapt to market changes, foster stronger customer relationships and, active participants in value co-creation (Abid et al., 2025; Rong-Da Liang et al., 2023). This ensures consistent, personalized experiences across touchpoints and channels (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026). The customer journey operates as a dynamic and multidimensional process that integrates cognitive, emotional, social, and physical responses across touchpoints including search, purchase, consumption, and post-sale interactions (Abid et al., 2025; Bolton et al., 2018; De Keyser et al., 2020). In hospitality and tourism, the journey involves complex experiential touchpoints, integrating online/offline marketing, on-site co-creation, and post-purchase relationship building through technology and feedback (Y. J. Kim & Kim, 2022; Agapito & Sigala, 2024), particularly shaped by co-creation processes and interaction frequency (Rong-Da Liang et al., 2023).

Although customer journey research has advanced considerably, much of the existing literature remains either conceptually broad or focused on specific touchpoints, channels, or episodes (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Tang et al., 2026; Zheng & Li, 2024). As a result, there is still limited guidance on how to operationalize the journey as a diagnostic, stage-based management tool capable of capturing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dynamics in an integrated way. This study addresses this gap by developing a comprehensive Customer Journey Tool, a questionnaire/grid that unifies diverse touchpoints into a single framework. The tool offers a structured method for capturing experiences across stages and channels, helping organizations identify "moments of truth," optimize interactions, and enhance satisfaction and loyalty.

The aim is to develop a stage-based Customer Journey Tool that captures customer experiences across key phases of the tourism and hospitality journey. This context is especially relevant because tourism and hospitality experiences are inherently multi-stage, experiential, and co-created. Customers interact with brands through digital search environments, booking systems, service personnel, physical environments, and post-consumption feedback platforms, making the journey particularly complex and difficult to manage through isolated touchpoint analysis alone. For this reason, hospitality and tourism provide a suitable context for developing a more integrated customer journey diagnostic. The study proposes a multidimensional framework that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions and translates them into a structured questionnaire/grid designed for diagnostic purposes. In addition, the research provides a preliminary empirical assessment of the tool's applicability in hospitality and tourism settings and explores its potential to support organizations in identifying critical touchpoints, understanding moments of truth, and improving customer journey management.

This study adopts a conceptual approach grounded in a systematic review of the literature. Its primary objective is to develop and structure a comprehensive framework and diagnostic tool for customer journey analysis in hospitality and tourism contexts. The proposed Customer Journey Tool is not empirically tested within the scope of this paper; rather, it is intended as a theoretically grounded instrument to be validated in future empirical research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of the customer journey has been widely examined across industries, with increasing emphasis on understanding how experiences unfold over time through multiple interactions between customers and firms. In hospitality and tourism, this perspective is particularly relevant due to the experiential, service-intensive, and co-created nature of value. Customer experience in this context is not confined to isolated service

encounters but emerges as a cumulative process shaped by interactions across different stages and touchpoints.

Building on the experience economy perspective (Abid et al., 2025; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), customer experience can be understood as a multidimensional and subjective construct that reflects how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to interactions with a service provider. Contemporary research increasingly recognizes that these responses are not purely cognitive, but also involve emotional and behavioral components that evolve throughout the journey. In tourism and hospitality settings, where experiences are immersive and often extended over time, these dimensions are closely intertwined and jointly influence outcomes such as satisfaction, memory formation, and loyalty.

2.1. Hospitality and Tourism—Learning from a Complex Tourism Experience Journey

Since the emergence of the experience economy (Abid et al., 2025; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), customer experience has become a central concept in hospitality and tourism research. A broad range of studies has examined how experiences are formed across different contexts, including airlines, hotels, restaurants, destinations, and peer-to-peer accommodation (e.g., Bonfanti et al., 2023; Masorgo et al., 2022; So et al., 2021; Tayaba et al., 2023). This body of work reflects the increasing relevance of experience as a key driver of value in service-intensive environments. One of the defining characteristics of hospitality and tourism is the complexity of the customer journey. Customers interact with firms through a combination of digital and physical touchpoints, such as online search platforms, booking systems, service encounters, physical environments, and post-consumption feedback channels. These interactions are not isolated; rather, they form part of a continuous process in which experiences develop over time. As a result, customer experience in this context is inherently multidimensional, involving cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, and behavioral actions that together shape perceptions of value, satisfaction, and subsequent decisions.

A further source of complexity lies in the role of value co-creation. Customers are no longer viewed as passive recipients but as active participants in the production of their own experiences (Abid et al., 2025; Rong-Da Liang et al., 2023). In hospitality and tourism, this participation takes multiple forms, including engagement with digital platforms, interaction with service personnel, and post-consumption sharing of experiences. Carvalho and Alves (2023) emphasize that value co-creation depends on behaviors such as participation, resource integration, and interaction with other actors. In peer-to-peer and platform-based settings, the distinction between provider and customer can become blurred (Lyu et al., 2023), which further expands the range of touchpoints that influence the journey. The characteristics of services also contribute to this complexity. Heterogeneity, inseparability, intangibility, and perishability (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; Custódio Santos et al., 2020; Zheng & Li, 2024) make it difficult to ensure consistent quality across different stages of the experience. Outcomes are shaped not only by firm-controlled elements but also by situational factors, interpersonal interactions, and individual expectations, all of which may vary across customers and contexts.

At the same time, customer behavior in tourism and hospitality cannot be fully explained by purely rational decision-making models. Experiential consumption often involves symbolic, emotional, and social motivations. Classical perspectives such as conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) highlight the role of status, while more recent work points to the growing importance of sustainability considerations in shaping tourist behavior (Sharpley, 2021). These perspectives suggest that a comprehensive understanding of the customer journey requires the integration of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. For these reasons, hospitality and tourism provide a particularly suitable context for examining customer journeys. The combination of multiple touchpoints, co-

created experiences, and diverse motivational drivers creates a setting in which customer experience unfolds in a complex and dynamic manner. This complexity also highlights a limitation in existing research: although many studies provide detailed insights into specific aspects of customer experience, fewer offer integrative approaches that capture how experiences evolve across stages of the journey in a way that can be operationalized for analysis and managerial use.

2.2. Customer Experience Theory

Customer experience has been widely conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that emerges from interactions between customers and firms across a range of touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Rather than being confined to individual service encounters, it reflects a cumulative process in which perceptions are formed and revised over time as customers move through different stages of interaction. Within this perspective, customer experience can be understood as involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that are interrelated but analytically distinguishable (Bolton et al., 2018). Cognitive responses refer to how customers interpret information, evaluate alternatives, and form expectations. Emotional responses capture affective reactions arising during interactions, which are particularly salient in experiential contexts such as hospitality and tourism. Behavioral responses include observable actions, such as search activities, purchase decisions, interactions with service personnel, and post-consumption behaviors, including feedback and recommendations.

The customer journey framework emphasizes the temporal structure of these responses. Early stages are typically associated with information acquisition and expectation formation, whereas later stages involve experience evaluation and post-consumption reflection (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In hospitality and tourism, this temporal dimension is especially relevant due to the extended and experiential nature of consumption, as well as the diversity of interactions involved (Agapito & Sigala, 2024; Y. J. Kim & Kim, 2022). An important implication of this perspective is that customer experience cannot be adequately understood by examining isolated touchpoints. Instead, it requires an approach that considers how different dimensions of experience develop and interact across stages of the journey. While existing research has provided detailed insights into specific aspects of customer experience, fewer contributions explicitly address how these dimensions can be systematically organized and operationalized across stages of the journey (Tueanrat et al., 2021). The present study builds on this line of research by proposing a stage-based framework that links cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions to distinct phases of the customer journey and translates them into a structured diagnostic tool.

2.3. A Holistic Approach to Understanding the Customer Journey

A holistic perspective on the customer journey considers the full set of interactions between customers and firms as an interconnected process rather than a sequence of isolated events. This perspective is particularly relevant in hospitality and tourism, where experiences are shaped across multiple touchpoints and evolve over time. Prior research has emphasized that customer experience reflects cumulative responses to these interactions, influenced by both firm-controlled elements (e.g., service design, physical environment) and less controllable factors such as individual expectations, emotions, and social influences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Understanding the customer journey from this perspective requires attention to the interplay between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Cognitive processes are involved in information evaluation and decision-making, emotional responses emerge during interactions and influence how experiences are perceived, and behavioral responses reflect how customers act across different stages, including search,

purchase, and post-consumption activities. These dimensions are closely interrelated and may evolve differently across stages of the journey.

Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) provides a useful lens for interpreting this process. From this perspective, value is not embedded in products or services but emerges through interactions among customers, firms, and other actors. In hospitality and tourism contexts, this implies that customer experience is co-created through engagement with service personnel, physical environments, digital platforms, and other customers. As a result, the customer journey cannot be fully understood without considering how these interactions contribute to the formation of value across stages. Adopting a holistic approach also has implications for how customer journeys are analyzed. Focusing on isolated touchpoints may provide detailed insights into specific interactions, but it offers limited understanding of how experiences develop over time.

An integrative perspective allows for the identification of patterns across stages, including how expectations formed in early phases influence later evaluations and how post-consumption experiences shape future behavior. While existing research has made important contributions to understanding customer experience and value co-creation, there remains a need for approaches that combine these insights into structured frameworks that can be applied systematically. In particular, linking cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions to specific stages of the journey provides a basis for developing tools that support both analysis and managerial decision-making.

2.4. The Stages of the Customer Journey and the Integration of Behavioral, Cognitive, and Affective Data

The customer journey is commonly conceptualized as a sequence of stages through which customers interact with a brand over time, typically encompassing pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase phases (Tueanrat et al., 2021). While this broad categorization provides a useful starting point, it tends to overlook important differences within the early stages of the journey. In particular, the processes of initial exploration and final decision-making involve distinct dynamics. To capture these differences more precisely, this study adopts a four-stage structure comprising inspiration and search, decision-making, consumption, and post-consumption. Across these stages, customer experience can be understood as the result of interacting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Cognitive processes are involved in information acquisition, evaluation of alternatives, and the formation of expectations. Emotional responses emerge throughout the journey and influence how experiences are perceived, remembered, and evaluated. Behavioral responses reflect observable actions, including search activities, purchase decisions, participation in service encounters, and post-consumption behaviors such as feedback and recommendations.

The relative importance and configuration of these dimensions vary across stages. Early phases are characterized by exploratory behavior and expectation formation, where cognitive processes are particularly salient but are already shaped by emerging affective responses. During the decision-making phase, cognitive evaluation becomes more focused, while emotional factors such as trust, confidence, and perceived risk play a significant role in shaping choices (Schmitt, 2003). The consumption stage involves direct interaction with the service or product, where emotional responses are often intensified, especially in experiential contexts such as hospitality and tourism, and are continuously evaluated against prior expectations (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). In the post-consumption stage, customers reflect on their experience, form overall evaluations, and engage in behaviors such as feedback and word-of-mouth communication, which influence both future behavior and the experiences of other customers (J. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Understanding the customer journey therefore requires an integrative perspective that considers how these dimensions develop and interact across stages, rather than examining individual

touchpoints in isolation. This perspective provides the basis for structuring customer experience in a way that can be systematically analyzed and translated into practical tools.

2.5. Integrating Behavioral, Cognitive, and Affective Data for a Comprehensive Understanding

A holistic understanding of the customer journey requires integrating behavioral, cognitive, and affective data. Behavioral data reveals customer actions such as purchase history and engagement, but alone it cannot explain motivations. Cognitive data clarifies decision-making processes and criteria, while affective data captures emotions throughout brand interactions (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Integrating these data types provides a more complete view of customer behavior. This multidimensional approach enables businesses to design empathetic, customer-centric experiences that meet both functional and emotional needs. For instance, high engagement in behavioral data may reflect satisfaction or frustration, distinctions only revealed through cognitive and affective insights.

This integration aligns with the Customer Experience Management (CEM) framework, which highlights analyzing diverse experience aspects to enhance innovation, satisfaction, and loyalty (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; De Keyser et al., 2020; Zheng & Li, 2024). Understanding how behavior, cognition, and emotion interact across journey stages allows firms to craft strategies that strengthen brand loyalty and differentiation in competitive markets.

2.6. The Role of Moderating Variables in the Customer Journey and the Feedback Loop: Satisfaction, Customer Delight, and Decision-Making

Effectively managing the customer journey requires understanding moderating variables such as customer commitment, time investment, and the nature of the service. These factors shape customer engagement across journey stages and influence satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term value (Reitsamer et al., 2024). Customer commitment is a key moderating factor. Highly committed customers show resilience toward minor service failures, deeper engagement, and stronger loyalty despite competitive alternatives (Bowden, 2009). In relationship-driven sectors such as hospitality, commitment enhances emotional bonds and customer lifetime value. Personalized marketing and loyalty programs can strengthen this connection, fostering repeat business and advocacy (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026). Committed customers often act as brand ambassadors, promoting positive word-of-mouth and brand equity.

Time investment also moderates the customer journey. It varies by product complexity, perceived risk, and individual preferences. Customers investing more time in the pre-purchase stage seek transparency, support, and detailed information (Bolton et al., 2018). Understanding time-related behaviors enables firms to design flexible journeys, offering in-depth information, personalized recommendations, and interactive tools that enhance trust and conversion (Bitner et al., 2000). Service nature further shapes engagement. High-touch services (e.g., consulting, healthcare) demand personalized interactions and continuous support, while low-touch services (e.g., e-commerce, self-service) emphasize efficiency and convenience (Bitner et al., 2000). Aligning journey design with service type ensures expectations are met, empathy and communication in high-touch settings build loyalty, whereas simplified processes and digital ease drive satisfaction in low-touch contexts.

A feedback loop linking satisfaction, delight, and decision-making is vital for continuous improvement. Satisfaction and delight are dynamic factors influencing future behavior and expectations (Oliver, 1999). Systematically collecting and analyzing feedback reveals pain points and innovation opportunities. Customer satisfaction is shaped by both cognitive and affective responses. which recent research conceptualizes as evolving dynamically across customer journey interactions (Abid et al., 2025). Integrating feedback into strategic decisions promotes customer-driven innovation. Real-time insights guide continuous improvement, aligning new developments with customer expectations. This

iterative process strengthens satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, driving long-term business success (Meijerink & Schoenmakers, 2021).

3. Customer Journey Tool: Pyramid and the Customer Journey Tool

The proposed Customer Journey Tool is grounded in the premise that customer experience emerges from the continuous interaction between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses across the customer journey. Rather than treating these dimensions as separate or sequential, the framework conceptualizes them as interdependent processes that jointly shape how customers perceive, evaluate, and act upon their experiences over time. This perspective builds on Customer Experience Theory, which views experience as a cumulative and multidimensional construct, as well as on Service-Dominant Logic, where value is co-created through interactions between customers and service providers (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; De Keyser et al., 2020; Zheng & Li, 2024). Within this context, the customer journey is not a linear sequence of events but a dynamic process in which cognition, affect, and behavior continuously influence one another across different stages.

3.1. The Pyramid Model: Integrating Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Dimensions

The Pyramid Model provides a conceptual representation of how cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions interact throughout the customer journey. Instead of privileging one dimension over the others, the model assumes that customer experience results from their combined and evolving influence. The cognitive dimension refers to processes of information acquisition, evaluation, and expectation formation. Customers interpret stimuli, compare alternatives, and develop judgments based on both internal preferences and external information (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). The emotional dimension captures affective responses that arise before, during, and after interactions with the service or product. These responses influence attention, memory, and evaluation, and play a central role in shaping overall experience (Aaker, 1997). The behavioral dimension reflects observable actions, including search activities, purchase decisions, participation in service encounters, and post-consumption behaviors such as feedback and recommendations (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; Zheng & Li, 2024).

Rather than operating independently, these dimensions interact continuously. Cognitive evaluations are influenced by emotional responses, while behavior both reflects and reinforces cognitive and affective processes. This dynamic interaction is particularly relevant in hospitality and tourism contexts, where experiences are co-created and unfold through multiple touchpoints involving both customers and service providers. The Pyramid Model therefore serves as an integrative structure that links theoretical constructs to observable aspects of the customer journey.

The integrative logic of the model is visually represented in Figure 1, which illustrates how cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions interact dynamically across the customer journey.

3.2. Operationalizing the Customer Journey: From Inspiration to Post-Consumption

Building on the Pyramid Model, the Customer Journey Tool translates the conceptual framework into a stage-based structure that enables the systematic examination of customer experience across the journey. The tool organizes the journey into four stages: Inspiration and Search, Decision-Making, Consumption Experience, and Post-Consumption Experience. This four-stage structure is adopted to distinguish more clearly between early exploratory processes and the later commitment phase, both of which are often grouped together in broader pre-purchase classifications despite involving different cognitive, emo-

tional, and behavioral dynamics. Figure 2 summarizes these stages and the touchpoints associated with them.

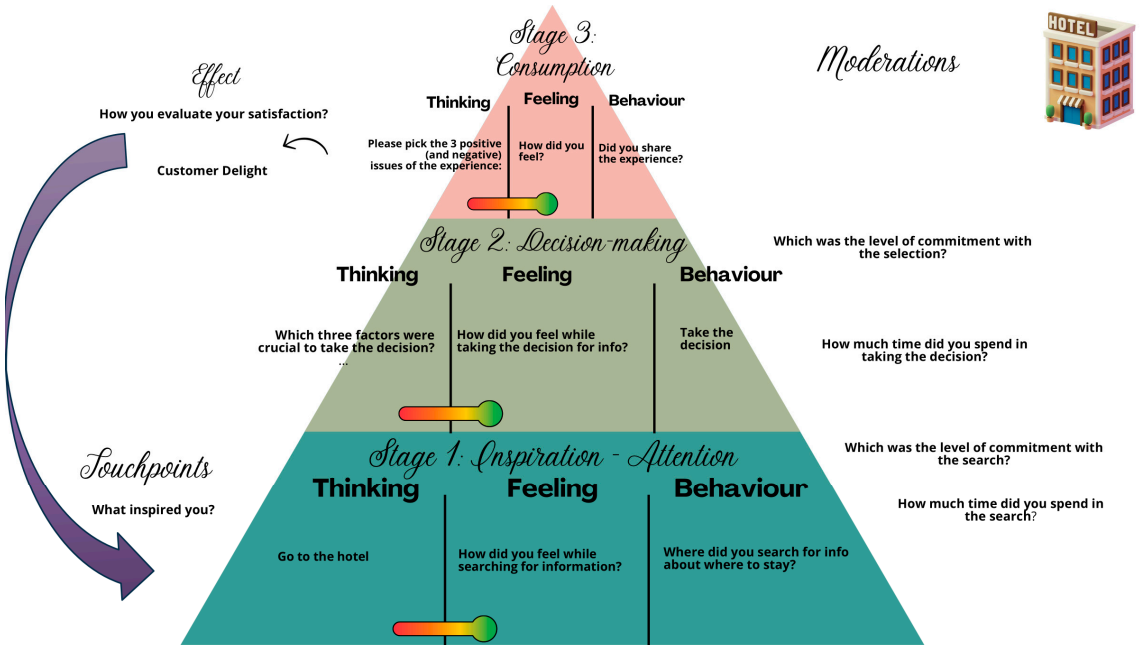


Figure 1. The customer journey pyramid: Integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Source: Authors' own work.

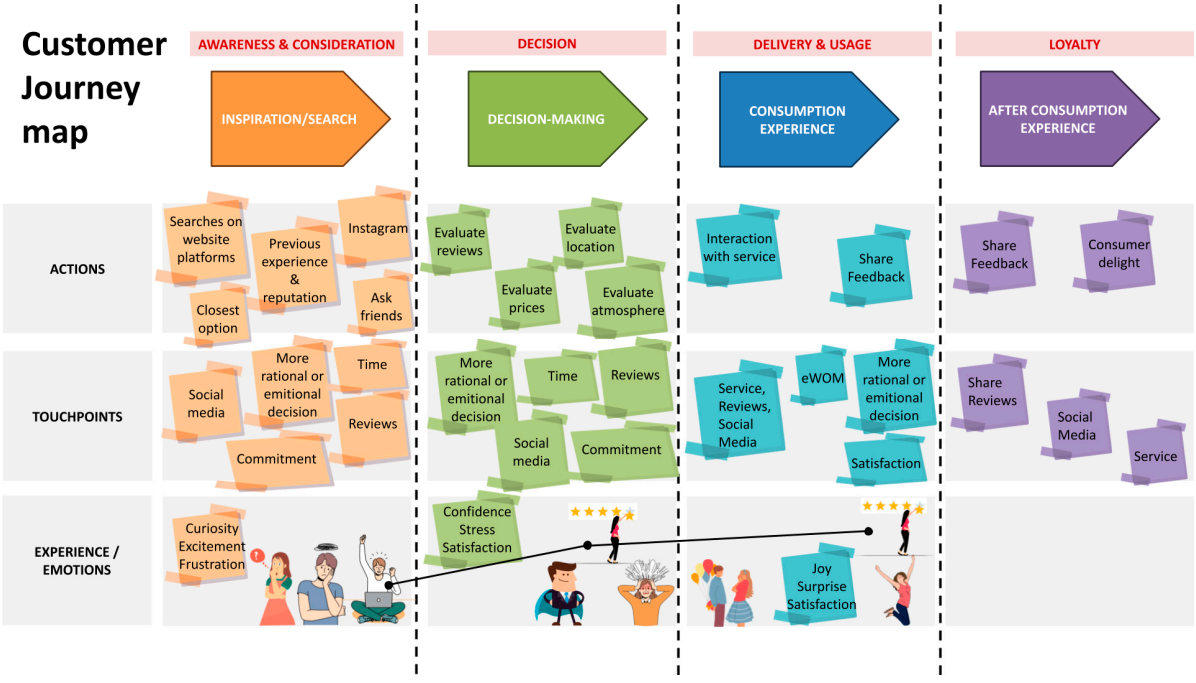


Figure 2. Journey stages from inspiration to post-consumption with key touchpoints. Source: Authors' own work.

Stage 1: Inspiration and Search

The Inspiration and Search stage corresponds to the initial phase in which customers become aware of an option, develop interest, and begin to gather information. At this point, customer experience is still largely anticipatory, but it is already shaped by a combination of reasoning, affective response, and observable engagement. From a cognitive perspective,

customers assess their needs and begin to evaluate whether a particular brand, service, or offering may satisfy them. Information obtained through social media, formal marketing communications, online reviews, travel blogs, and interpersonal recommendations contributes to this process by reducing uncertainty and helping customers frame the available alternatives (Bhinde et al., 2023; Y. J. Kim & Kim, 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In hospitality and tourism, where offerings are often intangible and difficult to evaluate before direct consumption, external cues become especially important.

Emotion is also present from the outset. Emotional responses throughout the customer journey play a key role in shaping satisfaction and loyalty (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). Curiosity, anticipation, excitement, and a sense of identification with a brand or experience can all shape how customers interpret information and which alternatives attract their attention. Visual imagery, storytelling, symbolic associations, and prior memories may generate affective responses that orient search behavior well before a formal decision is made (Abid et al., 2025; Guan et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2026). Behaviorally, this stage is expressed through actions such as visiting websites, comparing options, reading reviews, saving alternatives, sharing links, or interacting with content on social media. These early behaviors provide evidence of initial engagement and can indicate how actively customers are constructing their preferences (Hysa et al., 2022; Dolan et al., 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This first stage is particularly important in hospitality and tourism because the characteristics of services—especially intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability—make preliminary evaluation more difficult than in many product categories. As a result, the interplay between cognition and emotion during search is not secondary; it is foundational to how alternatives are perceived and how expectations are formed (Fuller et al., 2023).

Stage 2: Decision-Making

The Decision-Making stage marks the transition from exploration to commitment. Here, the customer narrows the range of options and moves toward a final choice. Compared with the previous stage, cognitive evaluation becomes more focused, but affective influences remain highly relevant. Cognitively, customers assess dimensions such as price, quality, convenience, location, perceived service reliability, and brand reputation. In tourism and hospitality, user-generated content, ratings, visual evidence, and prior reviews often play a decisive role because they help customers infer service quality under conditions of uncertainty (Bonfanti et al., 2021; Guan et al., 2021; Y. J. Kim & Kim, 2022). At the same time, emotional responses shape the decision environment. Trust, anxiety, confidence, anticipation, and perceived reassurance can influence how alternatives are judged and whether the customer is willing to commit. Positive emotions and trust can facilitate decision closure, whereas uncertainty, tension, or lack of emotional fit may delay or even prevent the purchase decision (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). This is especially visible in hospitality settings, where promises of personalized attention, exclusivity, comfort, or authenticity can reduce perceived risk and strengthen purchase intention (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009).

Behaviorally, the outcome of this stage is reflected in booking, reserving, purchasing, or selecting a final option. Yet the behavioral act should not be interpreted as purely rational. It is the result of an interaction between evaluation and feeling, and this is precisely why a multidimensional tool is needed. Digital infrastructures such as review platforms and booking interfaces do not merely facilitate transactions; they also shape perceived confidence, ease, and emotional assurance during decision formation (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; Dolan et al., 2019; Hysa et al., 2022; Zheng & Li, 2024).

Stage 3: Consumption Experience

The Consumption Experience stage corresponds to the customer's direct interaction with the service. This is the point at which anticipated value is confronted with lived experience, and it is therefore central to the formation of satisfaction, delight, disappointment, and later loyalty-related outcomes. The cognitive dimension at this stage is expressed through the ongoing evaluation of whether the service or experience meets, exceeds, or falls short of prior expectations. Customers assess both tangible and intangible aspects of the encounter, including service efficiency, cleanliness, atmosphere, responsiveness, staff behavior, and overall coherence of the experience. These evaluations shape perceived value and strongly influence the likelihood of repeat engagement (Busser et al., 2022; Dominici & Guzzo, 2010; Oliver, 1980).

Emotion becomes salient during consumption. Joy, comfort, surprise, delight, irritation, frustration, and disappointment may emerge in response to the service environment, interpersonal contact, or unexpected moments within the experience. In hospitality and tourism, emotional intensity tends to be especially high because consumption often involves immersion, symbolic value, and memory formation. Personalized gestures, surprise elements, or thoughtful design features may strengthen emotional attachment, whereas failures in service delivery may generate disproportionate dissatisfaction (Griessmair et al., 2022; J. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Behaviorally, customers participate actively in the service process. They interact with staff, navigate the environment, respond to service design, and may begin sharing reactions even before the experience has concluded. Behaviors such as giving immediate feedback, modifying use patterns, or posting online content during the experience reflect how cognition and emotion are translated into action. These actions are analytically important because they reveal that the customer is not merely evaluating the experience passively but co-producing it in real time (Dolan et al., 2019; Hysa et al., 2022; Yachin, 2018). This stage is therefore not simply about service delivery. In tourism and hospitality, it is more accurately understood as an experience encounter in which cognitive judgments, emotional responses, and behavioral participation converge in particularly visible ways (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015).

Stage 4: Post-Consumption Experience

The Post-Consumption Experience stage begins once the immediate encounter has ended and the customer reflects on the experience as a whole. This stage is especially important because it shapes memory, future behavior, and the broader social diffusion of experience through recommendations, reviews, and advocacy. Cognitively, customers interpret the experience retrospectively. They assess whether it fulfilled expectations, whether it delivered value, and whether it deserves repetition or recommendation. These evaluative processes contribute to more stable judgments of satisfaction and influence long-term loyalty intentions. In hospitality and tourism, such assessments are strongly linked to service quality, emotional resonance, and perceived authenticity of the experience (Dominici & Guzzo, 2010; Guan et al., 2021). Emotion continues to matter after consumption. Feelings such as delight, gratitude, disappointment, nostalgia, or emotional fulfillment affect how the experience is remembered and narrated. In particular, customer delight has consequences beyond simple satisfaction because it can intensify advocacy and increase the likelihood of emotionally rich word-of-mouth communication (Liu & Keh, 2015). Personalized gestures, pleasant surprises, or moments of perceived exceptional care may therefore continue to influence customer attitudes well after the service has ended (Griessmair et al., 2022).

Behaviorally, this stage includes reviews, recommendations, referrals, social media posts, complaint behaviors, and return intentions. Such actions are highly consequential

because they not only reflect the customer's own evaluation but also become informational and emotional inputs for future customers. In this sense, post-consumption behavior feeds back into the early stages of other customers' journeys, making the customer journey socially interconnected rather than purely individual (Abid et al., 2025; Dolan et al., 2019; Hysa et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2026). The expansion of social media and digital review platforms has intensified the visibility and influence of this stage. Customer communication now circulates rapidly and at scale, shaping the perceived attractiveness of services, destinations, and brands through a continuous flow of user-generated content (Narangajavana Kaosiri et al., 2019). For this reason, post-consumption experience should not be treated as the endpoint of the journey, but as a stage with direct implications for future journey formation, both for the focal customer and for others exposed to their evaluations.

4. The Customer Journey Tool in Practice: Measuring Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Variables

The proposed Customer Journey Tool was operationalized through a structured survey designed to capture cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses across the four stages of the journey identified in the conceptual framework: inspiration and search, decision-making, consumption, and post-consumption. The instrument was developed by adapting and integrating existing scales from the literature in order to ensure conceptual consistency while maintaining flexibility for application in hospitality contexts. At each stage, the questionnaire captures distinct but interrelated dimensions of experience. In the inspiration and search phase, items focus on information acquisition, exposure to stimuli, and the formation of initial preferences. These measures draw on prior work examining digital and social influences on early-stage consumer behavior (Bhinde et al., 2023), adapted to include both online and offline sources relevant to hospitality settings.

In the decision-making stage, the instrument assesses how customers evaluate alternatives and form purchase intentions. This includes both cognitive aspects of information processing and affective influences related to confidence, trust, and perceived risk. The structure of this section is informed by research on tourism-related decision processes and web-based consumer behavior (Ho et al., 2012), complemented by items capturing the interplay between rational evaluation and emotional response (VanBergen et al., 2022). The consumption stage focuses on the lived experience of the service encounter. The instrument captures emotional reactions during the experience as well as ongoing evaluations relative to expectations. Measures of affective response are adapted from established scales used in hospitality research (Burns & Neisner, 2006; J. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017), while overall evaluative judgments are based on commonly used satisfaction measures (Busser et al., 2022; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Finally, the post-consumption stage captures reflective evaluation and subsequent behaviors, including feedback, sharing, and potential repeat engagement. This section draws on research examining customer engagement and online interaction in post-experience contexts (Hysa et al., 2022; Meijerink & Schoenmakers, 2021), as well as measures associated with customer delight (Liu & Keh, 2015). In this study, consumer delight is operationalized as a two-dimensional construct comprising a disconfirmative dimension (reflecting perceptions that the experience exceeded normal expectations through outstanding service performance) and an affective dimension (capturing emotional responses such as surprise, excitement, stimulation, and feelings of experiencing something special). The full set of constructs and survey items is provided in Appendix A. Although the questionnaire is illustrated in a hotel context, its structure is designed to be adaptable to other tourism and hospitality settings, including destinations, restaurants, and service platforms.

Measurement Tool Evaluation Across the Customer Journey Stages

The Customer Journey Tool enables a structured analysis of how cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions may evolve across the four stages of the journey. Rather than focusing on isolated touchpoints, the framework provides an integrated lens through which the interplay of these dimensions can be examined across the entire experience. In the inspiration and search stage, the tool highlights how customers may draw on both informational and experiential cues when forming initial impressions. Cognitive processes are reflected in the evaluation of available information sources, such as online reviews, digital platforms, or interpersonal recommendations, while emotional responses begin to shape early preferences and expectations. The relative weight of these elements may vary depending on factors such as prior experience, familiarity with the context, or perceived risk.

During the decision-making stage, the framework captures the interaction between evaluative and affective processes. Customers are expected to assess functional attributes such as price, location, or service characteristics, while also relying on subjective elements related to trust, confidence, and perceived fit. This stage illustrates how cognitive evaluation and emotional response are not independent, but jointly contribute to the formation of a final decision. In the consumption stage, the tool emphasizes the increasing salience of emotional responses during direct interaction with the service environment. At the same time, cognitive evaluation continues through ongoing comparisons between expectations and actual experience. Behavioral engagement is also central at this stage, as customers actively participate in the service process and interact with multiple elements of the experience. This reinforces the view of the customer as a co-creator of value rather than a passive recipient.

The post-consumption stage is characterized by reflective evaluation and subsequent behavioral responses. Customers interpret their experience retrospectively, forming judgments related to satisfaction and value, while emotional responses influence how the experience is remembered and communicated. These processes are expressed behaviorally through actions such as sharing feedback, providing reviews, or considering future interactions. Taken together, this measurement tool illustrates how the proposed tool can be used to map the dynamic interaction between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions across stages. While the framework does not rely on a specific empirical dataset, it provides a structured basis for future empirical research and offers a consistent approach for analyzing customer journeys in hospitality and tourism contexts.

5. Conclusions

The Customer Journey Tool provides both theoretical and practical contributions by offering a holistic framework for understanding and managing customer behavior. It is especially valuable in service industries where emotional engagement drives satisfaction and loyalty. By aligning business strategies with the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the journey, the tool fosters sustainable competitive advantage and brand advocacy. This framework integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions across all stages of the customer journey and includes a questionnaire-guide to systematically map critical touchpoints.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study advances Service-Dominant Logic (S-DL) by operationalizing and mapping value co-creation across each stage of the customer journey. By measuring affective (delight) and cognitive (satisfaction) dimensions within a unified model, it deepens understanding of Customer Experience Theory (CET). The proposed Pyramid Model structures stakeholder

interactions, translating S-DL into a measurable diagnostic tool. It also refines CET by integrating the thinking–feeling–behaving triad into a single framework. By treating affective (e.g., delight) and behavioral (e.g., eWOM) outcomes as measurable post-consumption variables, it moves beyond rational satisfaction models, recognizing the predictive power of emotions and positive surprises in fostering loyalty (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). The tool links cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions throughout the journey. This holistic framework captures their interplay from inspiration to post-consumption reflection, especially in tourism where multisensory and emotional experiences drive loyalty (Bonfanti et al., 2021; Guan et al., 2021). Unlike traditional models isolating these factors, it supports integrated methodologies in experience research (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In hospitality, where emotional connection is key, integrating cognitive and emotional dimensions enhances satisfaction and loyalty (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). The tool demonstrates how thinking, feeling, and behaving interact dynamically across all stages, shaping outcomes such as loyalty and advocacy (Cheong et al., 2021; Y. J. Kim & Kim, 2022). It bridges a gap by uniting cognitive and emotional factors into a continuous, measurable model. Customer value co-creation, central to hospitality and tourism, is also emphasized. Customers act as active participants through behaviors such as participation, co-production, and resource integration (Assiouras et al., 2023; Carvalho & Alves, 2023). The tool extends S-DL (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) by showing how cognitive and emotional processes drive co-created value at key touchpoints.

A major contribution of the tool is addressing the gap in Customer Experience Management research, where cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions are often studied separately. The Pyramid Model unifies these elements into a coherent system that helps firms develop strategies for deeper customer connections and stronger advocacy. Integrating these dimensions provides an actionable framework for identifying pain points and opportunities for innovation (Bang & Schweitzer, 2026; De Keyser et al., 2020; Zheng & Li, 2024). Hospitality research highlights the need for multi-dimensional tools to evaluate service quality and behavior (Bonfanti et al., 2023; J. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Methodologically, the tool combines quantitative and qualitative insights, linking measurable outcomes like satisfaction and engagement with underlying cognitive and emotional processes. This approach enriches understanding of consumer behavior and offers actionable guidance for improving customer experience strategies (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026).

5.2. Practical Implications

Practical applications in hospitality and tourism confirm that structured frameworks enhance customer experience (Bonfanti et al., 2023; Guan et al., 2021). Personalized approaches integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions strengthen satisfaction and advocacy. The Customer Journey Tool provides a robust framework for analyzing and optimizing experiences by capturing the interplay between these three dimensions. It enables targeted strategies that meet both rational and emotional needs, critical in sectors where satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy drive long-term success.

Integrating the Pyramid Model helps identify intersections where cognitive expectations, emotional engagement, and behaviors align, offering insights for service improvement. Aligning emotional engagement with service quality increases brand loyalty (Guan et al., 2021), while emotional triggers are vital for superior hotel experiences (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). Understanding these touchpoints allows businesses to deepen emotional engagement and loyalty. Feedback systems are central to maintaining competitive advantage. Studies by Y. J. Kim and Kim (2022) and Dolan et al. (2019) show how online reviews and social media drive satisfaction and help resolve service failures. The tool

facilitates real-time feedback loops connecting satisfaction, delight, and decision-making, allowing businesses to adapt quickly to evolving needs.

The tool also supports personalization by combining behavioral data with cognitive and emotional insights. Personalized interactions and surprise elements foster emotional engagement and loyalty (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). Managing omni-channel experiences requires seamless transitions between online and offline touchpoints (Buhalis et al., 2022; Larke et al., 2018). The tool ensures cross-channel consistency by analyzing behavior across platforms and on-site interactions (H. Kim & So, 2022). Understanding how cognitive decision-making (e.g., price comparison) contrasts with emotional engagement (e.g., in-person service) enables cohesive and emotionally rich experiences that encourage repeat visits.

Managers can follow a three-step roadmap:

Touchpoint Audit: Identify and assess performance gaps.

Resource Prioritization: Focus on touchpoints with the largest gaps, especially in early and post-consumption phases.

From Satisfaction to Delight: Train staff to create "magic moments" that inspire positive eWOM and sustainable competitive advantage.

5.3. Limitations

A primary limitation of this study lies in the absence of a fully reported empirical validation within the manuscript. Although the proposed framework and measurement tool have been preliminarily applied in hospitality contexts, the present paper does not include a detailed account of the empirical design, data, or statistical analysis. As a result, the evaluation of the tool remains illustrative, and further research is needed to provide comprehensive empirical testing. This research pioneers a holistic diagnostic model for customer journey management that extends beyond descriptive frameworks, offering the first formal tool for auditing customer experience in tourism by integrating Customer Experience Theory (CET) and Service-Dominant Logic (S-DL). Despite its contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on hospitality and tourism, industries inherently driven by experience. While this focus enables deep exploration of complex journeys, the findings may not generalize to more transactional sectors (Carvalho & Alves, 2023).

Second, during any future empirical research using the measurement tool, the research relies on self-reported survey data, which may introduce method bias, social desirability, and recall limitations. Respondents may report idealized rather than actual behaviors (Burns & Neisner, 2006). Although multi-item scales and validated constructs were used to enhance reliability (Busser et al., 2022; J. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017), these biases cannot be entirely eliminated. Third, while diverse, the sample was drawn from specific cultural and geographic contexts. Cultural differences can affect expectations, emotions, and decision-making, limiting generalizability (Carreira et al., 2014; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Cross-cultural research is needed to assess whether the model holds across different settings and to identify contextual variations (Lyu et al., 2023). Finally, the study's focus on the pre-, purchase-, and post-purchase stages may overlook micro-moments and emergent behaviors between phases, particularly in digital contexts. The growing influence of AI, smart technologies, and mobile applications presents new dimensions that future studies should explore (Buhalis et al., 2022; Cheong et al., 2021).

5.4. Future Research

This study lays a solid foundation for understanding the customer journey in hospitality and tourism, yet several promising research directions remain. The next phase of the process is to test the measurement tool in an empirical study across the industry in Ireland, Spain and Türkiye.

A subsequent avenue involves extending the Customer Journey Tool to other industries with distinct interaction dynamics (online vs. onsite), to test its adaptability in capturing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions across varied service environments (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Future studies could also examine the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, smart systems, and digital platforms, that increasingly mediate business–customer interactions (Buhalis et al., 2022; Cheong et al., 2021). Real-time data and predictive analytics offer opportunities to analyze micro-moments and personalize experiences. Research could further explore how these technologies shape satisfaction, loyalty, and value co-creation in omnichannel contexts (Larke et al., 2018).

Cross-cultural research would provide insights into how journey dynamics vary by region and culture. Since cultural values influence expectations, emotions, and decisions (Lyu et al., 2023), comparative studies could test the framework's universality and refine it for global markets (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026). Finally, further inquiry into the emotional and affective dimensions of customer journeys is warranted. Understanding how emotions influence decisions and post-purchase behaviors is crucial, especially in experiential sectors where positive emotions foster loyalty and advocacy (Abid et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2026).

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Appendix A

Table 1. Constructs and Questions Used in the Customer Journey Tool.

Phase	Construct	Question	Items	Authors
Inspiration and search	Inspiration & Attention	Describe what you did to find inspiration or how you got in touch with information that caught your attention about the hotel:	1. A message in Instagram got my attention 2. My friends/family recommended it 3. My previous experience in the hotel 4. I knew because the reputation of the hotel. 5. I was in the area, and I show the hotel 6. It was the closest option given the aim of the tryp 7. I was searching for a hotel in internet	Adapted from Bhinde et al. (2023).
	Information search	Where did you search for information (you can select 3 options) about where to stay?	1. Google (or another search engine) 2. Recommendation at a restaurant, travel agency or other face-to-face external source 3. TripAdvisor 4. Comments on social media about the restaurant 5. Website (of the restaurant) 6. Instagram or other social media 7. I asked my friends/family 8. I didn't search for information	Based on the study of Ho et al. (2012).
	Rational versus Emotional	In this search you would say that we were:	1. More rational 2. More emotional 3. None of them	Based on the study of VanBergen et al. (2022).
	Commitment	Which was the level of commitment with the search, in a scale from 0 to 5 (being 0 not committed at all and 5 very committed?	1. Not committed 2 3 4 5. Very committed	Adapted from Ni et al. (2022).

Table 1. *Cont.*

Phase	Construct	Question	Items	Authors
Inspiration and search	Feelings	How did you feel while searching for information? (multiple options can be chosen):	1. Happy 2. Understood 3. Frustrated 4. Angry 5. Ashamed 6. Guilty 7. Fearful 8. Proud 9. Pleased 10. Loved 11. Joyful 12. Respected 13. Sure 14. Overwhelmed 15. Worried 16. Unsure 17. None of the previous ones	Adapted from studies of Burns and Neisner (2006), and J. Kim and Fesenmaier (2017).
	Time	How much time did you spend in the search?:	1. Less than 10 min 2. Between 10 and 20 min 3. Between 20 and 30 min 4. Between 30 min and 1 h 5. More than 1 h	Based on the study of Mieli (2023).

Table 1. *Cont.*

Phase	Construct	Question	Items	Authors
Decision-making	Decision factors	Which three factors where crucial to take the decision? (you can select 5 options):	1. The location 2. The restaurant 3. The atmosphere (in terms of other clients) 4. The staff 5. The size of the room 6. The design of the room 7. The luminosity (in terms of windows) of the room 8. The photos of the reception and entrance hall 9. The option of a spa 10. The option of a gym 11. The price 12. The breakfast 13. The local character of the hotel 14. The design 15. The prestige of the hotel 16. The exclusive atmosphere 17. The comments (TripAdvisor or other social media) 18. The comments from family/friends 19. The Parking 20. The photos of the bathroom 21. Available offers 22. The international atmosphere 23. The originality	Adapted for study's purpose from Castro et al. (2017).
	Rational versus Emotional	In your selection you would say that we were:	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	
	Commitment	Which was the level of commitment with the selection, in a scale from 0 to 5 (being 0 not committed at all and 5 very committed?:	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	

Table 1. *Cont.*

Phase	Construct	Question	Items	Authors
Decision-making	Feelings	How did you feel while taking the decision for information? (multiple options can be chosen):	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	
	Time	How much time did you spend in the taking the decision?:	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	
Consumption experience	Decision factors	Please pick the 3 main positive issues of the experience:	See *"Decision-making"* phase	
		Please pick the 3 main negative issue of the experience:		
	Feelings	How did you feel?:	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	
	Rational versus Emotional	During the experience, you would say that you were:	See *"Inspiration and search"* phase	
	Satisfaction	How to you evaluate your satisfaction from 1 to 5 (being 1 very dissatisfied and 5 very satisfied):	1. Very dissatisfied 2 3 4 5. Very satisfied	Adapted from Busser et al. (2022).
	eWOM	Did you share the experience?:	1. Yes, online during the stay 2. Yes, online afterwards 3. Yes, online while and after the stay 4. Yes, talking with my family/friends 5. No	Based on the studies of Hysa et al. (2022), Meijerink and Schoenmakers (2021), and Lin et al. (2022).

Table 1. *Cont.*

Phase	Construct	Question	Items	Authors
After consumption experience	Consumer delight	Finally, can you describe your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements?:	1. The experience in the hotel was very pleasant 2. The staff seemed interested in helping me 3. They were really helpful and polite 4. Most services were very satisfying 5. They made me think that I was very important 6. I was treated like royalty 7. The service I received was much more than generally necessary Affective dimension 8. The experience at the hotel was full of wonderful surprises 9. The hotel was a pleasant surprise 10. The stay was very exciting 11. I felt stimulated during the stay 12. My day/s in the hotel is truly a special one 13. I felt that I was exceptionally lucky that day 14. I never thought that I could enjoy a stay at a hotel so much	Based on the study of Liu and Keh (2015).

Source: Authors' own work.

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