

Determinants of Restaurant Love: Mediating Role of Restaurant Trust

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Abstract

This research paper examines the influences of restaurant reputation, restaurant experience, and restaurant trust on restaurant love where restaurant trust is used as mediator. Majority (53%) of the 365 respondents were male. Respondents' data were collected with closed-end questionnaire and random sampling technique was followed while selecting the respondents. The researcher used SPSS and AMOS to analyze the collected data. The data analysis shows that restaurant reputation and restaurant experience positively influence the restaurant trust and restaurant love and trust mediates between the relationships of reputation and love as well as between the relationship of experience and restaurant love. This research has, implications, limitations, discussed in the last section.

Keywords: Restaurant Love; Restaurant Reputation; Restaurant Experience; Restaurant Trust; Schema Theory

Introduction

Restaurants, food points, hotels, and other segments of hospitality and tourism industry are striving to attract and retain customers. Businesses do their best to improve their image/ reputation and service quality. It can be helpful in retaining existing customers as well as bringing new customers. People tend to revisit their loved places and brands. Various factors contribute towards this love which is the focus of the present research. This study investigates the impact of reputation, experience, and trust on brand love as a social psychology concept.

Brand love is, “*the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name*” (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p.3). Triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) provided foundations for researchers to study the concept of love in social psychology. Further work by researchers (Shimp & Madden, 1988) and an empirical study (Ahuvia, 1994) contributed towards this theory. Passion or love was termed as an important dimension of brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998). Brand or brand name plays a significant role in success or failure of the business.

Brand love has significant influence on customers' decisions regarding purchase, repurchase and recommendations of products and services (Drennan et al., 2015; Song et al., 2019; Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012). Restaurants focus on customer relationship as a competitive advantage and business forecasts (Song et al., 2022). Brand love is crucial in this brand-customer relationship because brand love represents a psychological connection and affection between customer and a particular brand (Han et al., 2022). Brand is an important antecedent of customer relationship which plays key role in the success of business (Yun & Kim, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

Research on brand love is very important because of the importance of brand love as discussed above. Purpose of the study is to investigate the determinants of brand love. The present study introduces research model comprising of restaurant reputation, experience, trust and love. Model depicts the direct influences of determinants of restaurant brand love. Trust is shown as mediator in

brand reputation-love and brand experience- love relationships.

Research questions

This study has the following research questions:

- 1) What is the impact of restaurant reputation on restaurant love?
- 2) What is the impact of restaurant reputation on restaurant trust?
- 3) What is the impact of restaurant experience on restaurant trust?
- 4) What is the impact of restaurant experience on restaurant love?
- 5) What is the impact of restaurant trust on restaurant love?
- 6) How restaurant trust mediates between restaurant reputation and restaurant love?
- 7) How restaurant trust mediates between restaurant experience and restaurant love?

Literature Review

Restaurant Reputation, Restaurant Love and Restaurant Trust

Reputation is a valuable resource of firms (Barney, 1991), which is a collective assessment of firm by its stakeholders (Barnett et al., 2006; Fombrun, 1996). Customers have impressions and beliefs regarding a product or service. Such impressions, beliefs, ideas and perceptions are called reputation (Ryu et al., 2012). Brand reputation plays key role in customer satisfaction and retention. Good reputation leads to brand success. According to Herbig and Milewicz (1995), brands with good reputation are successful and earn their market share by making profits. Businesses including restaurants do their best to establish and maintain good reputation to keep their customers satisfied and loyal. According to Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) reputation is characteristics of brand as perceived by stakeholders and “*the development of brand reputation means more than keeping customers satisfied, it is something a company earns over time and refers to how various audiences evaluate the brand*” (p. 315). Reputation has significant impact on attitudes toward products and services (Brown, 1995) and purchase intentions (Yoon et al., 1993). Brand love is customers’ attitude towards the brand (Rubin, 1973). Based on this discussion, the present research assumes that restaurant brand reputation has positive relationship with restaurant brand love and establishes the following hypothesis:

H1: Restaurant reputation has positive relationship with restaurant love.

Corporate reputation having strategic value (Raithel & Schwaiger, 2015), positively influences trust, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Sung & Yang, 2008; Walsh et al., 2009). Trust is a significant determinant of buying behaviors in restaurants (Bredahl, 2001). Positive brand reputation indicates low risk level, reduces uncertainty, enhances trust, and influences buying decisions of customers (S`maiz`iene, 2008). Trust plays key role in establishing and maintaining good relationship between businesses and customers (Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007). Restaurant industry is a service industry where customers may be uncertain about services, quality of food and other issues such hygiene and safety measures. Cretu and Brodie (2007) argue that reputation has more important role to play in restaurant industry. Consumer trust is crucial in building and maintaining relationships in hotel (Lovell, 2009) and restaurant (Oh, 2002) industry. Reputation enhances trust in service quality (Herbig & Milewicz, 1995) and studies confirm positive impact of brand reputation on brand trust (Suh & Houston, 2010; Torres- Moraga et al., 2010). So, this study establishes the hypothesis as:

H2: Restaurant reputation has positive relationship with restaurant trust.

Restaurant Experience, Restaurant Trust and Restaurant Love

Consumers seek information and knowledge of brand through experiences which shape their beliefs and feelings. These feelings and beliefs build and enhance their attitudes towards the brands (Wright, 2006). Positive brand experience is among the factors of brand attachment and brand trust. Studies regarding fashion brands (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013) and hotel brands (Kang et al., 2017) show that brand attachment is enhanced by brand experience. Researchers (Alloza, 2008; Klein et al., 2016) defined brand experience as responses from consumer-brand interaction and these responses last for long period of time (Brakus et al., 2009; Roswinanto & Strutton, 2014). In restaurant industry, consumers/ customers respond to their consumption experiences and perceive restaurant brand as good or bad. As a rule of thumb, good restaurant experiences imprint good image and poor experiences imprint poor image in minds of customers. In other words, experiences leave impressions in minds of customers.

Researchers (Chen-Yu et al., 2016), through the lens of Schema Theory (Bartless, 1932), see brand experience as formation of impressions. Schema theory, “describes how people perceive new experiences by activating the mental schema stored in their memory” (Chen-Yu et al., 2016 p.5). Memory schema (previous experience of brand/s) influence future purchase decisions (Alba & Hasher, 1983). Customers gain brand’s understanding through brand experiences which enhances their brand trust (Lau & Lee, 1999). Research show that brand experience has significant relationship with brand trust (Sharifi & Esfidani, 2014; Weisberg et al., 2011). Therefore, hypothesis H3 was proposed as under:

H3: Restaurant experience has positive relationship with restaurant trust.

According to Verhoef et al. (2009) brand experience creates customer loyalty. Restaurant experience can be either direct or indirect. Buying and consuming food or enjoying services give direct experience whereas advertisement and marketing provide indirect experience (Brakus et al., 2009). Various qualitative studies show that brand experience and brand love are interrelated (Bagozzi et al., 2017). Previous research shows the significant contribution of brand experience in creation of brand love (Bicakcioglu et al., 2018; Garg et al., 2016; Huang, 2017; Sarkar et al., 2019). As a result of the above mentioned research findings, the present research posits the following hypothesis:

H4: Restaurant experience has positive relationship with restaurant love.

Restaurant Trust and Restaurant Love

Brand experience builds brand trust which ultimately results in brand attachment (Langner & Seidel, 2015). Brand trust can be defined as consumers’ faith in brand performance (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Brand trust is a positive and affective brand experience by consumers (Esch et al., 2006), and is linked to altruism, brand honesty, reliability and love (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Research findings show that strong brand trust is result of customer satisfaction (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001). Trust promotes commitment, loyalty and positive attitude towards brand (Knox & Walker, 2001) and contributes to brand love (Drennan et al., 2015). Trust has strong relationship with intimacy and love (Larzelere & Huston, 1980) and brand love and emotions (Kaufmann et al., 2016). Further, research findings suggest that trust is an antecedent of long-term relationships (Matzler et al., 2008). So, it is believed that brand trust has positive impact on brand love and following relationship is hypothesized:

H5: Restaurant trust has positive relationship with restaurant love.

Mediating Role of Brand Trust

The present research investigates the mediating impact of brand trust between relationship of brand reputation and brand trust. It also studies the mediating role of brand trust in relationship of

brand experience and brand love. Brand image (brand reputation in the present study) has significant impact on brand trust (Flavian et al., 2005; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Lin et al., 2017; Sallam, 2016) and enhances (Chen, 2010). Research shows that brand experiences build trust which develops attachment (Park et al., 2006; Silva & Alwi, 2006). Brand experience also provides satisfaction and value for consumers (Brakus et al., 2009). Satisfied customers tend to stay with the brand (Berry et al., 2002; Heinrich et al., 2008). Studies show that brand trust is built by brand experience/s (Francisco-Maffezzoli et al., 2014). Brand trust creates positive emotional attachment (Frasquet et al., 2017; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Vlachos et al., 2010). Based on these findings, following hypotheses are established:

H6: Restaurant trust mediates the relationship between restaurant reputation and restaurant love.

H7: Restaurant trust mediates the relationship between restaurant experience and restaurant love.

Research Model

Based on literature review and established hypotheses, following is the proposed research model:

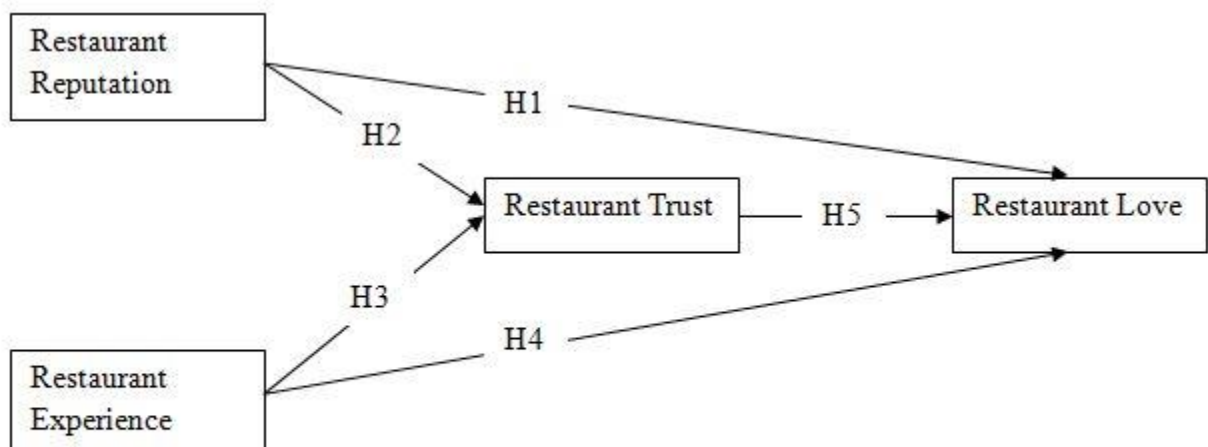


Figure 1: Research Model (mediating effects of H6 and H7 are not portrayed)

Methodology

Data for the present research were collected from customers of the restaurants in Rahim Yar Khan district of Punjab province of Pakistan. The data were collected during the months of January and February 2023. The customers aged over 18 years were randomly selected as the participants of this study. This Simple Random Sampling provided equal opportunities to all customers for being selected. The participants were requested to fill the printed questionnaires. The researcher collected 365 questionnaires. First 40 questionnaires were used in pilot study which showed satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's alpha) values between 0.825 and 0.903. After these satisfactory findings, further data were collected.

The present research used questionnaire with close-end questions. The questionnaire contains

the five-point Likert scale with (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral-Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree). Questionnaire comprises of measurement items adapted from previous studies which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measures

Code	Construct Item	Source
Restaurant Reputation (ResR)		
ResR_1	This restaurant is trustworthy.	Han et al. (2015)
ResR_2	This restaurant brand is reputable.	
ResR_3	My friends highly appreciate this restaurant brand.	Song et al. (2019)
ResR_4	This restaurant is popular with people.	
Restaurant Experience (ResE)		
ResE_1	I feel good when I experience this restaurant brand.	Kim et al. (2018)
ResE_2	This restaurant brand gives me pleasure.	
ResE_3	It is fun to experience this restaurant brand.	
ResE_4	Experiencing this restaurant brand is enjoyable.	
Restaurant Trust (ResT)		
ResT_1	I think this restaurant brand is trustworthy.	Kim et al. (2018)
ResT_2	I think this restaurant brand is competent.	
ResT_3	I think this restaurant brand is honest.	
ResT_4	I have confident in the quality of this restaurant brand.	
Restaurant Love (ResL)		
ResL_1	This is a wonderful restaurant.	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006)
ResL_2	This restaurant brand makes me feel good.	and Shen et al. (2021)
ResL_3	This restaurant brand is totally awesome.	
ResL_4	I love this restaurant.	
ResL_5	I am very passionate about this restaurant brand.	

The researcher used *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), V.19* and *Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS), V.21* to analyze the data. The relevant results or research findings are discussed under *Results* section.

Results

Respondents' Profile

Table 2 shows summary of descriptive statistics of the respondents (age, education and gender). In age category, most of the respondents 151 (41.30%) fall in 26 to 33 years' age group, followed by 34 to 41 age group which is 132 (36.20%) respondents. Most of the respondents are with masters or higher education. Female respondents are slightly less than male respondents.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents' Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	18 - 25	40	11.0
	26 - 33	151	41.3
	34 - 41	132	36.2
	42 - 49	25	6.8
	50 and above	17	4.7
	Total		365
Education	Intermediate	55	15.1

Gender	Graduation	141	38.6
	Masters and above	169	46.3
	Total	365	100.0
	Female	170	46.6
	Male	195	53.4
	Total	365	100.0

Data Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity tests show satisfactory results. Reliability of the data was assessed with values of Cronbach's alpha. All alpha values are above 0.70 and are satisfactory (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2016; Nunnally, 1978). Values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were above 0.50 and are acceptable (Hair et al., 2010; Nunnally, 1978). AVE and factor loadings were calculated to assess the convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Values of composite reliability (CR) were also acceptable as these are above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2012). Values of Cronbach's alpha, AVE, factor loading and composite reliability are given in table 3. Discriminant validity is ascertained by comparing square root of AVE with correlations between two constructs. Discriminant validity results are satisfactory as values of square root of AVE are greater than inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 1998; Park et al., 2014). These findings are shown in table 4.

Results of hypothesized measurement model (using AMOS-V.21) are also satisfactory because model fit indices fits the data well. These values were as: $\chi^2/d = 3.814$, GFI=0.950, CFI=0.909, NFI=0.908, TLI=0.817, RMSEA=0.339.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	M	SD	Cronbach's α	FL	CR	AVE
ResR			0.871		0.719	0.691
ResR_1	3.52	0.918		0.725		
ResR_2	3.53	0.939		0.773		
ResR_3	3.53	0.875		0.737		
ResR_4	3.45	0.896		0.805		
ResE			0.928		0.763	0.783
ResE_1	3.17	1.098		0.791		
ResE_2	3.08	1.021		0.803		
ResE_3	3.01	1.081		0.718		
ResE_4	3.12	1.094		0.781		
ResT			0.929		0.734	0.704
ResT_1	3.35	1.094		0.844		
ResT_2	3.38	1.059		0.825		
ResT_3	3.32	1.099		0.783		
ResT_4	3.37	1.118		0.847		
ResL			0.879		0.792	0.732
ResL_1	3.34	1.093		0.810		
ResL_2	3.32	1.072		0.814		
ResL_3	3.46	1.059		0.823		
ResL_4	3.41	1.060		0.796		
ResL_5	3.38	1.076		0.819	0.739	0.738

Note: ResR = Restaurant Reputation, ResE = Restaurant Experience, ResT= Restaurant Trust, ResL= Restaurant Love. Values represented at significance of $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Analysis

Construct	M	SD	ResR	ResE	ResT	ResL
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Restaurant Reputation (ResR)	3.51	0.766	1			
Restaurant Experience (ResE)	3.10	0.975	0.326**	1		
Restaurant Trust (ResT)	3.36	0.999	0.339**	0.402**	1	
Restaurant Love (ResL)	3.38	0.822	0.255**	0.336**	0.763**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). a. Listwise N=365

Hypotheses Testing

Relationships among variables were checked with AMOS using structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. Data analysis shows positive significant direct relationships among variables. It indicates that all hypotheses relevant to direct relationships are supported. Results are summarized in Table 5 as under.

Table 5. Summary of Relationships of Independent and Dependent Variables

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Beta Values (β)	R-Square (R ²)	Significance (p< 0.01)	Result
H1	ResR → ResL	0.41		0.000	Supported
H2	ResR → ResT	0.36		0.000	Supported
H3	ResE → ResT	0.57		0.000	Supported
H4	ResE → ResL	0.33		0.000	Supported
H5	ResT → ResL	0.62		0.000	Supported
ResT	Direct relationship		0.72		
ResL	Direct relationship		0.52		

Note: ResR = Restaurant Reputation, ResE = Restaurant Experience, ResT= Restaurant Trust, ResL= Restaurant Love. Values represented at significance of p < 0.01.

Standardized path coefficients (β) values show significant impact of independent variables on relevant dependent variable. All hypotheses are supported (p < 0.01). Restaurant brand reputation (ResR) and brand experience (ResE) bring 72% variation in restaurant brand trust (ResT) as its shows R-square (R²) value of 0.72. There is 52% variation in restaurant brand love due to restaurant trust as relevant R-square (R²) value is 0.52.

Mediation Analysis

The researcher used SPSS PROCESS macro (5000 bootstrap) with probe interactions (p≤ 0.01) and 95 percent confidence interval, to test mediation of restaurant brand trust in relationships; (a) between restaurant reputation and restaurant love, (b) between restaurant experience and restaurant love. These results are summarized in table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Mediation Results

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Estimate	Lower	Upper	Significance	Result
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					Bound	Bound	(p< 0.01)			
H6	ResR	→	ResT	→	ResL	0.763	0.187	0.375	0.000	Supported
H7	ResE	→	ResT	→	ResL	0.587	0.184	0.324	0.000	Supported

ResR = Restaurant Reputation, ResE = Restaurant Experience, ResT= Restaurant Trust, ResL= Restaurant Love.

Results of mediation analysis show that trust fully mediates between both relationships. So, H6 and H7 are accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research explored the impacts of restaurant brand reputation and restaurant brand experience, on brand trust and brand love. It also studied the relationship between restaurant brand trust and restaurant brand love. The present study fills this gap to the date. Positive and significant impact of restaurant reputation on restaurant love and restaurant trust suggests that restaurant customers are conscious to brand reputation which builds their trust on, and love for restaurant/s. These findings are in accordance with the previous studies in respect that good reputation leads to brand love (Breckler, 1984). Brand experience has significant positive impact on restaurant trust and restaurant love. It suggests that positive restaurant experience of consumers emotionally attach them with the restaurant, builds trust and love for that restaurant. Previous studies show positive relationship of brand experience and brand love (Brakus et al., 2009; Oliver et al., 1997; Wallace et al., 2014). Brand experience leads to trust on brand (Sharifi & Esfidani, 2014). The present study validates these findings. Positive influence of restaurant brand trust on restaurant love is also in accordance with the previous studies (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Drennan et al., 2015; Kaufmann et al., 2016). This study has theoretical and practical implications as well.

Theoretical Implications

Data analysis showed positive relationship of experience, reputation, trust and love of restaurant. Restaurant experience of customers and reputation of restaurant have positive influence on restaurant trust and restaurant love. Restaurant trust also mediates in relationships of reputation, experience and love for restaurant. This study has significant theoretical contributions by providing model for determinants (reputation and experience) of restaurant brand trust and brand love. This research enriches the body of knowledge in fields of reputation, experience, trust and love of restaurants. Reputation of restaurant helps in maintaining a long-term relationship between customers and the restaurant. Personal experience of customers also builds their trust on the restaurant. Restaurant trust leads to love for restaurant and customers tend to visit such restaurants in future. It also provides insights for future use of this model in the light of Schema theory.

Practical Implications

Restaurants can attract and retain customers by improving reputation and trust of customers in their restaurants. To do so, they should focus on strategies to improve their reputation. They should also struggle to provide better quality products, services and environment for their customers. Good service features of restaurants lead to customer loyalty (Tahir, 2022). So, it is very important for restaurants that they provide high-quality goods and services to their customers. When customers experience such products and services, they have more trust in restaurant which leads to love for restaurant. Customers tend to buy more frequently from their trusted restaurants. Restaurants should

try to provide good and positive experiences to restaurant customers. Restaurants should focus on the reputation of their restaurants. These efforts can attract new customers as well as retain the existing customers. Good reputation and experience can be competitive advantage of the restaurant/s and can enhance trust, loyalty and love from customers. Trust on restaurant significantly mediates in relationships of restaurant reputation and experience, and restaurant love. Restaurants should recognize and regard the customers who have trust on the restaurant.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has a number of limitations. Statistical data analysis shows the significant positive relationships between variables, but these results cannot be generalized because data were collected from one district only. Future studies can address this issue by covering larger geographical areas. Construct items for the questionnaire were selected and adapted to meet the needs of respondents. Restaurant brand experience includes few items from previous studies whereas experience has many dimensions with separate measurement items. Brand experience has dimensions such as affective, behavioral, intellectual, and sensory Brakus et al. (2009). Individual impact of these experience dimensions with the relevant measurement items can be studied in future research. The present research introduced research model, but it was used in cross-sectional study. Future research can use this model in longitudinal studies. The present research referred to Schema theory while studying the relationships of variables. It just investigated the impact of independent variables. Future studies should focus on phenomenon of creation of brand trust and brand love through the lens of Schema theory. The present research included age, education and gender of participants. Future studies can include other demographic characteristics such as income and marital status of the participants. Data were collected from restaurants only and future studies can consider food points, food stalls and other forms of food kiosks.

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