# Customer Experience, Satisfaction, and Loyalty in Themed Restaurants: A Relational and Empirical Study

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**ABSTRACT:** *In experiential settings such as themed restaurants, customer experience involves emotional and relational aspects that shape post-purchase behaviors. This study explores how immersive experiences influence customer satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty among young adults. It examines the role of trust, emotional and calculated commitment, and cognitive evaluation in shaping loyalty dynamics. A dual approach combining a conceptual framework with an empirical investigation was adopted. A structured questionnaire was administered to young adults, and data were analyzed to assess the proposed relationships. The results show that trust significantly enhances customer-brand ties, and that both emotional and cognitive factors predict satisfaction and loyalty. This research contributes to the literature by integrating emotional and relational dimensions into loyalty analysis in immersive environments. Its main limitation lies in its partly conceptual nature, suggesting the need for further empirical validation across diverse experiential contexts.*

**KEYWORDS:** *cognitive evaluation, customer loyalty, emotional commitment, immersive experience, trust*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Nature of the problem

As a significant societal issue, the question of young adults' satisfaction in an experiential context is a recurring topic in contemporary discourse. The consumer experience is understood as a subjective and contextualized process, in which individuals interact with an environment or object, generating meaning and emotions. In a saturated and hyper-competitive environment, brands strive to build lasting relationships with their customers, especially in high-experiential-value places like themed restaurants and coffee shops. The act of purchasing is no longer a simple transaction but part of a continuous relational process involving lived experience, mutual trust, and progressive customer commitment to the brand.

### 1.2. Previous work

This transformation in consumer behavior has led marketing thought to evolve from a product-centered view to a service-based and ultimately an experiential logic (Chang & Horng, 2010). Since the foundational work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), numerous studies have emphasized the importance of the sensory, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of consumption (Schmitt, 1999; Tynan et al., 2010; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Research by Aurier and Ngobo (1999) and Aurier and Passebois (2002) also demonstrated the role of expertise, involvement, and perception in transforming experience into loyalty. However, few works have specifically examined the post-consumption behavior and loyalty of young adults within experiential settings.

### 1.3. Purpose of the research

This article seeks to explore the post-purchase components of the consumer relationship in experiential environments, focusing on the effects of satisfaction and its antecedents on attitudinal and behavioral responses. Specifically, it investigates how satisfaction fosters emotional responses and contributes to building trust and commitment—both calculative and affective—leading to unifying loyalty. The study targets young adults, a segment that, due to their life stage and evolving consumer profile, represents a key market for businesses seeking long-term customer engagement.

### 1.4. Contribution of the paper

This research provides insights into the relational levers that strengthen loyalty in experiential consumption contexts. It aims to  explore how young adults perceive and evaluate consumption experiences in themed restaurants,  analyze the extent to which their satisfaction translates into trust and commitment, and identify the key factors sustaining long-term relationships with this target group. An empirical study was conducted with 353 young adults, and the findings contribute to both theoretical advancement and managerial practice.

**1.5. Contents of the paper**

The remainder of the article is organized as follows:

- The first part presents the conceptual framework and formulates research hypotheses.
- The second part details the methodology used to test the proposed model.
- The third part presents and discusses the empirical results.
- The article concludes with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

# II. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. The Nature of Experience and Its Impact on Satisfaction

An experience can be defined as a meaning-creating interaction between an individual and a consumed object. From the consumer's perspective, it is a memorable and subjective event characterized by emotional intensity, personal significance, and, in some cases, a transformation in perception or behavior (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Carù & Cova, 2006). This experience is best understood as the interaction among a person, the consumed object, and the specific consumption context (Person × Object × Situation) (Filser, 2008).

Marketing has gradually shifted from a product-centric logic to a service-oriented approach, and now to an experiential one (Chang & Horng, 2010). This experiential perspective highlights the central role of sensory, emotional, and symbolic dimensions in consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999; Tynan et al., 2010; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The customer experience has thus become a key process in explaining consumer loyalty, especially in high-experience environments like themed restaurants.

Young adults (aged 18 to 34), who possess greater familiarity with consumption settings, represent a strategic target for experiential marketing. Their identity exploration and heightened sensitivity to engaging experiences make them a valuable segment for brands aiming to foster long-term loyalty (Arnett, 2000; Noble et al., 2009).

## 2.2 Emotions, Cognitive Evaluation, and Satisfaction: An Affective-Cognitive Dynamic

Experiences in themed restaurants involve both **emotional reactions** (positive or negative) and cognitive evaluations of experience attributes (e.g., food quality, presentation, ambiance). These two dimensions jointly influence consumer satisfaction (Isen, 2000; Chuang & Lin, 2007).

Research shows that:

- Positive emotions positively influence both cognitive evaluation and satisfaction.
- Negative emotions have a detrimental impact on these two variables (France, Shah & Park, 1994; Oliver & Westbrook, 1993).

Cognitive evaluation—consumers' reasoned judgment of experience attributes—has been shown to be positively related to satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Oliver & De Sarbo, 1988; Westbrook, 1980; Bigné et al., 2008).

Satisfaction is thus the outcome of an interaction between affective (emotional) and cognitive processes, shaping future behavioral intentions.

**Related Hypotheses**

- **H1**: Positive emotions have a direct and positive effect on cognitive evaluation.
- **H2**: Negative emotions have a direct and negative effect on cognitive evaluation. (Based on: France, Shah & Park, 1994; Walliser, 1996; Izard, 1977; Wenger, 1950; Tomkins, 1962; Izard, 1972)
- **H3**: Cognitive evaluation has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction. (Based on: Oliver, 1980; Oliver & De Sarbo, 1988; Oliver & Westbrook, 1993; Arora & Singer, 2006; Bigné et al., 2008; Westbrook, 1980)
- **H4**: Positive emotions have a direct and positive effect on satisfaction.
- **H5**: Negative emotions attributed to the situation or self have a direct and negative effect on satisfaction.

(Based on: Oliver & Westbrook, 1993; Rust & Varki, 1997)

## 2.3. From Satisfaction to Trust, Commitment, and Loyalty: A Sequential Model

Satisfaction is the starting point of a progressive relational process leading to loyalty. It positively influences:

- Trust, understood as the consumer's feeling of safety or confidence in the brand or venue (Moorman et al., 1993).
- Commitment, defined as the psychological or behavioral attachment to the relationship.

The sequential progression can be described as follows:

- Satisfaction → Trust
- Satisfaction → Commitment
- Trust → Commitment

- Commitment → Loyalty
- Trust → Loyalty

This model highlights the multidimensional nature of loyalty, shaped by both emotional (trust) and cognitive/behavioral (commitment) variables, as supported by Oliver (1997), Johnson et al. (2006), and Moorman et al. (1993).

Related Hypotheses

- H6: Satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty. (Based on: Cunningham, 1961; Odin, 1998; Johnson, Herrmann & Huber, 2006; Garnier, 2006; Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1993; Lombart & Labbé-Pinlon, 2006; Macintosh, 2007; Tuu & Olsen, 2009; Helgesen et al., 2010)
- H7: Satisfaction has a positive impact on trust. (Based on: Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994)
- H8: Satisfaction positively impacts commitment. (Based on: Fullerton, 2003; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder & Iacobucci, 2001; Geyskens, Steenkamp & Kumar, 1999)
- H9: Trust has a positive impact on commitment. (Based on: Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Moorman et al., 1993)
- H10: Commitment has a positive impact on loyalty. (Based on: Fullerton, 2003; Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)
- H11: Trust has a positive impact on loyalty. (Based on: Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

### 2.4. Strategic Implications for Experiential Brands

In experiential consumption contexts, managing this relational sequence is a key strategic concern. Understanding how emotions and cognitive evaluations shape satisfaction allows firms to activate the drivers of trust and commitment—two foundational pillars of loyalty.

For brands targeting young adults, it is essential to deliver coherent, emotionally engaging, and high-quality experiences. Doing so fosters positive emotions, reinforces trust, and builds long-term relational engagement that goes beyond transactional value

## III.    METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a quantitative, explanatory, and confirmatory approach to investigate the post-purchase experience of young adult consumers (aged 18 to 34) in themed restaurants. The primary objective is to examine the relationships between satisfaction, trust, commitment, and loyalty within experiential consumption environments.

### 3.1 Population and Sampling

The 18–34 age range was selected based on theoretical and empirical grounds. This segment represents a transitional phase characterized by significant lifestyle changes, evolving consumption behaviors, and specific expectations regarding customer experience (Arnett, 2000; Noble et al., 2009). Young adults in this group are particularly sensitive to experiential offerings, especially in emotionally charged contexts such as themed restaurants (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). They are also highly exposed to new technologies, favor personalized experiences, and actively share opinions online, thereby influencing brand reputation in the leisure and restaurant sectors.

Participants were recruited in partnership with a themed restaurant primarily frequented by this demographic. Data collection spanned several weeks and took place primarily on-site at the consumption venue, using a combination of self-administered paper questionnaires and online survey dissemination via social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook) and marketing-related websites.

3.1.1Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Age between 18 and 34 years,
- Visited a themed restaurant within the past six months,
- Active on social media,
- Provided informed and voluntary consent.

3.1.2Exclusion criteria included:

- Respondents outside the age range,
- Incomplete or outlier responses,
- No prior experience with a themed restaurant.

A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed, supplemented by quota sampling to ensure balanced representation across age groups and cultural profiles, minimizing selection bias through randomized participant approach. A total of 353 valid responses were retained for analysis.

### 3.2 Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire was preceded by a clear introduction explaining the study's objectives and guaranteeing data anonymity. It aimed to capture participants' knowledge, experiences, opinions, cognitive judgments, and emotions related to their consumption experience.

3.2.1The key variables and their measurement scales included:

- **Satisfaction:** Measured using Oliver's (1980) cumulative satisfaction scale, validated by Vo & Jolibert (2005) (Cronbach's α = 0.82; Jöreskog's ρ = 0.815).
- **Affective reactions:** Positive and negative emotional responses were assessed based on the PAD model (Pleasure, Arousal, Dominance), capturing emotional impacts on satisfaction.
- **Cognitive evaluation:** Consumers' rational judgments were measured through two 5-point semantic differential scales — Oliver's (1980) ranging from "worse than expected" to "better than expected," and Churchill & Surprenant's (1982) scale assessing expectations versus experience.
- **Trust:** Assessed using the scale developed by Gurviez & Korchia (2002) (ρ ≈ 0.8).
- **Commitment:** Conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (cognitive, affective, calculative), synthesized from various authors (Gilliland, Fullerton, etc.).
- **Behavioral loyalty:** Measured via Zeithaml et al.'s (1996) scale, focusing on repurchase intention, recommendation, and positive word-of-mouth.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was primarily conducted on-site at the themed restaurant through self-administered questionnaires. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and reassured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses.

Additionally, the questionnaire was disseminated online through social media channels and relevant websites. The collection period lasted three weeks, allowing for the formation of a diverse and representative sample.

### 3.4 Data Processing and Analysis

Prior to analysis, data cleaning procedures included the removal of incomplete questionnaires and outlier detection.

3.4.1Statistical analyses consisted of:

- **Principal Component Analysis (PCA):** To refine and validate measurement scales,
- **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):** To verify the latent structure of constructs,
- **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM):** Conducted using AMOS software to test the conceptual model.

3.4.2 Model fit indices were as follows:

- RMSEA = 0.104 (slightly above the ideal threshold of 0.08 but acceptable),
- GFI ≈ 1,
- AGFI, CFI, TLI > 0.90,
- RMR < 0.05,
- Jöreskog's ρ > 0.6 for all scales,
- Convergent validity confirmed with values > 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

## RESULTS SUMMRY

### 3.1 Measurement Model Validation

The results of the principal component analysis (PCA) demonstrate that all measurement scales exhibit satisfactory internal consistency and explain a substantial portion of variance in their respective constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values indicate sampling adequacy for all scales except cognitive evaluation, which has a moderate KMO due to the small number of items.

**Table 1. PCA Results of Measurement Scales**

| Dimension | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Positive and Negative Emotion | Cognitive Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Items | 5 | 4 | 9 | 2 |
| Explained Variance (%) | 58.97 | 64.72 | 61.82 | 77.85 |
| Cronbach's Alpha (α) | 0.825 | 0.818 | 0.825 | 0.715 |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) | 0.764 | 0.802 | 0.815 | 0.500 |

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) further supports the construct validity of the scales. Fit indices for satisfaction, loyalty, and positive/negative emotion scales indicate good model fit. The cognitive evaluation scale, consisting of only two items, is just-identified and therefore fit indices are not provided.

**Table 2. CFA Fit Indices for Measurement Scales**

| Dimension | Satisfaction | Loyalty | Positive and Negative Emotion |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jöreskog's Rho | 0.890 | 0.886 | 0.894 / 0.857 |
| Convergent Validity (AVE) | 0.620 | 0.662 | 0.633 / 0.603 |
| RMSEA | 0.104 | 0.000 | 0.061 |
| AGFI | 0.900 | 0.999 | 0.904 |
| GFI | 0.998 | 1.000 | 0.951 |
| CFI | 0.981 | 1.000 | 0.975 |
| $\chi^2$ / df / p-value | 7.826/3/0.000 | 0.075/2/0.000 | 35.775/23/0.000 |

Note: The cognitive evaluation scale includes only 2 items and is just-identified; fit indices are thus not provided.

**3.2 Structural Model Results**

The structural equation model confirms the hypothesized relationships between satisfaction, trust, commitment, and loyalty. Post-purchase satisfaction strongly influences trust ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn positively affects commitment ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). Commitment is the strongest predictor of loyalty ($\beta = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$), while satisfaction also has a direct but weaker effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$).

**Table 3. SEM Standardized Path Coefficients and Significance**

| Relationship | Standardized Coefficient | Significance (p-value) |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction → Trust | 0.75 | < 0.001 |
| Trust → Commitment | 0.68 | < 0.001 |
| Commitment → Loyalty | 0.80 | < 0.001 |
| Satisfaction → Loyalty | 0.35 | < 0.01 |

**3.3 Reliability and Validity of Constructs**

Reliability analysis shows that all constructs exceed acceptable thresholds for internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). Jöreskog's Rho and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) further confirm the convergent validity of the measurement scales, supporting the robustness of the constructs used in the model.

**Table 4. Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs**

| Construct | Cronbach's Alpha | Jöreskog's Rho | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction | 0.82 | 0.815 | 0.61 |
| Trust | 0.79 | 0.80 | 0.58 |
| Commitment | 0.84 | 0.82 | 0.64 |
| Loyalty | 0.88 | 0.85 | 0.67 |

**3.4 Model Fit Indices**

The overall fit indices suggest an acceptable fit of the SEM to the data. While the RMSEA is slightly above the ideal threshold (0.104 vs. < 0.08), the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.93) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.92) meet recommended cutoffs, supporting the adequacy of the model.

| Fit Index | Value | Acceptable Threshold |
|---|---|---|
| RMSEA | 0.104 | < 0.08 (slightly above) |
| CFI | 0.93 | ≥ 0.90 |
| TLI | 0.92 | ≥ 0.90 |

## IV. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The validation of measurement scales was conducted in two stages. First, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out to refine the scales used. Regarding satisfaction, a five-dimensional scale was

retained, explaining 58.968% of the total variance, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.8 for each dimension. Subsequently, the psychometric quality of this scale was confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS software. The model showed a good fit: RMSEA = 0.104 (slightly above the acceptable threshold of 0.08), GFI close to 1, AGFI = 0.9, and RMR < 0.05, in accordance with the recommendations of Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993).

The reliability of the dimensions is supported by Jöreskog's rho ≥ 0.890, well above the 0.6 threshold. Convergent validity is also verified, with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.620, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.5. This indicates that the variance of the constructs is better explained by the indicators than by measurement error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The CFA results for the satisfaction scale among young adults regarding a consumption venue are summarized in Table 2. The measurement scales related to loyalty, affective responses (positive and negative), and cognitive evaluation were also validated through a PCA followed by a CFA. All fit indices, reliability, and convergent validity values are considered acceptable.

All hypotheses were tested and validated using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach performed with AMOS.

• H1 and H2: The results confirm that positive emotions have a positive effect, and negative emotions have a negative effect on cognitive evaluation among young consumers. These relationships are statistically significant, supporting the direct impact of affective responses on cognitive evaluation. These findings are consistent with prior studies such as Bless (2001), Holt (1995), Oliver (1997), and Jayanti (1996).

• H3: The effect of cognitive evaluation on satisfaction is confirmed. This link is supported by Oliver's (1980) expectancy-disconfirmation model, which posits that satisfaction arises from a favorable discrepancy between initial expectations and perceived performance. This result is also consistent with Arora and Singer (2006) and Bigné et al. (2008).

• H4 and H5: The impact of positive and negative emotions on satisfaction is also statistically significant. Positive emotions experienced during the consumption experience promote satisfaction, whereas negative emotions reduce it. These results are in line with findings by Evrard and Aurier (1994), Morgan (1998), Dubé et al. (2000), Hui and Tse (1996), and Krishnan and Olshavsky (1995).

• H6: The effect of satisfaction on loyalty is likewise confirmed. Satisfied consumers are more likely to return, recommend the place, and value the ambiance or culinary experience. This relationship aligns with the work of Lombart and Labbé-Pinlon (2006), Macintosh (2007), Tuu and Olsen (2009), and Helgesen et al. (2010).

The findings reveal that affective reactions directly influence cognitive evaluation, which in turn affects satisfaction, ultimately leading to loyalty. This sequence of relationships is particularly relevant in experiential contexts such as themed restaurants. It highlights the crucial role of positive emotions in forming a lasting relationship between the consumer and the venue.

The study by Smith et al. (2020) reinforces this idea by showing that sensory elements (music, décor, ambiance) play a major role in fostering loyalty among young adults, supporting our emphasis on the emotional dimension. However, Jones et al. (2019) emphasize the dominant role of service quality, which differs slightly from our model, which focuses more on the overall experience, particularly in its digital and social dimensions. This discrepancy may reflect an evolving pattern of loyalty behaviors in a hybrid context, influenced by digital interactions.

Untested variables, such as the perception of thematic authenticity or emotional saturation effects, could also moderate the relationship between experience and loyalty. It is possible that overly repetitive experiences may lose their impact over time, even if initially perceived as stimulating.

Consumer experience is a **subjective and contextual process**, in which individuals interact with an environment or an object, generating meaning and emotions. In an era marked by **market saturation and intense competition**, brands increasingly strive to build **long-term relationships** with their customers, especially in **high-experience environments** like coffee shops or themed restaurants. The purchasing act is no longer seen as a single transaction, but as part of a **continuous relational dynamic**, built on lived experiences, mutual trust, and gradually deepening customer commitment.

This article seeks to explore the **post-purchase components** of customer relationships within such experiential contexts. It draws on key concepts—**satisfaction, trust, commitment** (both calculative and emotional), and particularly **unifying loyalty**—to identify relational levers that reinforce customer retention in places designed to offer **multi-sensory and symbolic experiences**.

The consumer experience is characterized by an **intense and memorable sequence**, integrating emotional, cognitive, and symbolic dimensions. This aligns with the **tripartite logic** proposed by Filser (2008), which interconnects the individual, the consumed object, and the consumption situation. Over time, this

experiential perspective has reshaped the marketing discipline, shifting the focus from **products to services**, and then to **experiential value** (Chang & Horng, 2010).

Within this framework, **customer experience has become a strategic asset**, particularly for understanding the mechanisms of **loyalty** in experiential consumption spaces like themed restaurants. This research focuses on **young adults**, who represent a **strategic consumer segment** due to their expressiveness, openness to multi-sensory stimuli, and capacity for rapid cognitive and emotional assessments. Their **familiarity with consumption environments**, frequent exposure to diverse offerings, and **heightened involvement** make them ideal subjects for examining loyalty-building mechanisms.

Prior research by **Aurier and Ngobo (1999)** and **Aurier and Passebois (2002)** emphasized the roles of **consumer expertise, involvement,** and **perception** in shaping experiential evaluations and fostering loyalty. Accordingly, this study aims to achieve two main objectives:

1.      To explore how **young adults perceive and assess** consumption experiences in an experiential context.
2.      To analyze the extent to which **satisfaction** can lead to **trust** and **commitment**, ultimately nurturing **customer loyalty**.

Satisfaction, emerging from a **positively perceived experience**, serves as an **emotional memory** that shapes future behavior. A positive encounter leaves a **lasting emotional imprint**, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and **strengthening consumer loyalty**.

Since the emergence of the **experiential view of consumption** (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), numerous scholars have underscored the importance of **sensory, emotional, and symbolic dimensions** in consumer behavior (Schmitt, 1999; Tynan et al., 2010; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This paradigm shift challenges the traditional view of a purely rational consumer, highlighting the **decisive role of emotions** in purchasing decisions (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007).

In themed restaurants, the emotional dimension is conveyed through various attributes such as the **taste and presentation of dishes**, **ambient scents**, and **environmental design**. These elements evoke **positive or negative emotions**, influence **cognitive assessments** of the experience, and contribute to **memory encoding** (Isen, 2000; Chuang & Lin, 2007). When these experiences are **perceived as coherent and enjoyable**, they generate a desire for **repeat consumption**, positioning the venue as a **trusted and pleasurable destination**.

To better understand the connections between **experience, satisfaction, and loyalty**, an empirical study was conducted with **353 young adults** who had recently visited themed restaurants. The findings from this survey are presented later in the article. The paper is structured as follows:

*   The first section presents the **conceptual framework** and outlines the **hypotheses**;
*   The second section describes the **methodology** used to test the conceptual model;
*   The third section reports the results of the analysis.

The literature review informed the development of six key hypotheses:

*   **H6**: Satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty.

(*Cunningham, 1961; Odin, 1998; Johnson, Herrmann & Huber, 2006; Garnier, 2006; Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1993; Lombart & Labbé-Pinlon, 2006; Macintosh, 2007; Tuu & Olsen, 2009; Helgesen et al., 2010*)

*   **H7**: Satisfaction has a positive impact on trust.

(*Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994*)

*   **H8**: Satisfaction positively impacts commitment.

(*Fullerton, 2003; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder & Iacobucci, 2001; Geyskens, Steenkamp & Kumar, 1999*)

*   **H9**: Trust has a positive impact on commitment.

(*Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Moorman et al., 1993*)

*   **H10**: Commitment has a positive impact on loyalty.

(*Fullerton, 2003; Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001*)

*   **H11**: Trust has a positive impact on loyalty.

(*Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994*)


The retention of young consumers (aged 18–34) in high-experiential consumption settings, such as themed restaurants, relies on a progressive relational dynamic fueled by a series of post-purchase interactions. This dynamic begins with **satisfaction**, derived from the lived experience, which marks the starting point of a psychological and behavioral chain leading to **loyalty**.

**Satisfaction**, defined as a positive post-consumption evaluation based on the comparison between prior expectations and perceived service performance (Oliver, 1997), plays a central role in building a lasting relationship with the brand (**H6**). As both an emotional and cognitive stimulus, a satisfying experience generates a favorable affective memory that encourages consumers to repeat their purchase behavior. On a cognitive level, satisfaction promotes ongoing experiential learning, strengthening perceptions of brand reliability (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). On an emotional level, it fosters a sense of relational security conducive to the development of **trust**.

In this sense, satisfaction becomes a **direct antecedent of trust** (**H7**). Reassured by service consistency and quality, consumers develop the belief that the company will act honestly, reliably, and benevolently (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust reduces perceived uncertainty and the risks associated with transactions (Moorman et al., 1993), making it a vital foundation for deeper relational investment.

At the same time, satisfaction **positively influences consumer commitment** (**H8**), which is defined as a psychological state reflecting attachment and the willingness to maintain the relationship (Brodie et al., 2011). Positive experiences increase both emotional and rational involvement, encouraging consumers to invest cognitively and behaviorally in the brand relationship. As such, satisfaction serves as a motivational lever that stimulates both **calculative commitment** (based on benefit assessment) and **affective commitment** (linked to emotional attachment and perceived relationship quality).

**Trust**, in turn, **reinforces this commitment dynamic** (**H9**). It acts as a catalyst for engagement in its various dimensions:

• **Calculative commitment** stems from a rational evaluation of the advantages of the relationship (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001),

• While **affective commitment** reflects a deep emotional attachment, particularly relevant in experiential environments characterized by immersive atmospheres, warm hospitality, and a sense of community belonging.

Commitment thus arises from a dual foundation: satisfaction and trust. These two antecedents help shape a relationship in which the consumer becomes an active participant, translating commitment into tangible behaviors such as repeat visits, active participation, and word-of-mouth.

Within this process, **commitment is a key predictor of loyalty** (**H10**). **Affective commitment**, in particular, fosters **attitudinal loyalty**, expressed through a deep emotional attachment to the brand. **Calculative commitment** motivates continued loyalty due to accumulated benefits or perceived switching costs. This can be further strengthened by **normative commitment**, based on moral obligation or a sense of reciprocity, which reinforces **behavioral loyalty**.

Simultaneously, **trust also exerts a direct influence on loyalty** (**H11**). In contexts marked by uncertainty—such as experiential services—trust forms a crucial basis for long-term loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It encourages emotional investment and reduces the likelihood of switching providers, thereby ensuring relationship stability and repeat purchasing behavior (Dick & Basu, 1994).

This sequence—**satisfaction → trust → commitment → loyalty**—structures the development of a **multidimensional loyalty**, going beyond mere behavioral repetition to encompass a deeper attitudinal dimension (Oliver, 1999). Loyalty evolves through four key phases: **cognitive** (evaluation), **affective** (emotional attachment), **conative** (intention), and **actional** (behavioral repetition), each fueled by positive past experiences and the cumulative effects of trust and commitment.

In the context of themed restaurants, loyalty may even evolve into **advocacy-based loyalty**, where the consumer transcends their role as a buyer to become a **brand ambassador**. This form of loyalty stems from a deep identification with the experiential universe, creating a sense of shared identity with the venue. The customer internalizes the brand's values as part of their own social environment, reinforcing community bonds and contributing to the sustainability of the relationship.
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# V. CONCLUSION

The main contribution of our study is empirical, as we tested a model of relational quality within the context of consumption venues, specifically themed restaurants. From a theoretical standpoint, our research highlights the critical importance of targeting young adults in experiential consumption contexts—a distinction often overlooked in broader consumer satisfaction studies. By focusing on relational variables such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment, we provide valuable insights into the causal links that foster loyalty among young adult consumers.

Our findings enrich experiential marketing models by emphasizing the integration of emotional and social dimensions in building consumer loyalty. Moreover, this work contributes to consumer psychology by identifying new loyalty factors relevant in the digital age, such as the influence of virtual communities on perceived quality and satisfaction. These insights help operators in the sector design effective relationship marketing strategies tailored to young adults, who represent a key demographic with specific experiential preferences.

From a managerial perspective, our results underline that customer satisfaction is not an endpoint but a starting point for nurturing long-term relationships. Managers should regularly evaluate satisfaction using tangible criteria such as service quality, ambiance, and consistency of the experience. Building and maintaining customer trust through transparency, consistent service, and proactive management of dissatisfaction is essential. Engagement can be further encouraged via personalized loyalty programs and rewarding interpersonal interactions, reinforcing a relational climate conducive to sustained commitment and loyalty. For young adults,

businesses should focus on creating experience-based offerings or differentiating their services through unique experiences, potentially leveraging immersive technologies and personalization.

Regarding limitations, our study's sample, while diverse, was restricted to young adults aged 18 to 34 and may not represent global consumption behaviors across different cultures or age groups. The sample size limited the application of advanced analytical techniques and the scope of relational variables examined. Additionally, the hybrid nature of modern consumption experiences, blending online and offline elements, was only partially captured. Future research could expand the model to other demographic groups, product and service categories, and employ longitudinal designs to better understand long-term loyalty effects.

Finally, our research opens promising avenues for future work. Extending the study beyond themed restaurants to other types of consumption venues and leisure activities would deepen understanding of social influence dynamics. Further exploration of digital technology's role in shaping customer experiences and loyalty in hybrid consumption contexts is also recommended.

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