Diagnosing customers experience, emotions and satisfaction in Malaysian resort hotels

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Abstract

Despite the increasing attention towards customer experience, empirical research to explain this notion and its consequences is still limited. Hence, this study aims to examine the effect of customer's experience with four dimensions on their emotions and satisfaction. A convenience sampling technique was used to select a sample of 600 at two tourist spots of Malaysia i.e., Langkawi and Penang. 450 questionnaires were returned back and the data was analysed using partial least square based structural equation modelling. Findings reveal that all the four dimensions of customer experience influence customer emotions which develop customer satisfaction. Resort hotels are least focused facet of tourism industry; therefore, this study validates the customer experience scale in the context of resort hotels and enhances the theoretical progress on the experience concept in relation with customer emotions and satisfaction and offer important implications for resort hotel marketers.

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Introduction

Resort hotels are becoming one of the fastest growing segments of tourism attractions around the world. Since economic boom from 1960s, resort hotels are gaining gradual popularity and the service providers are facing challenges to

satisfy the needs and wants of the tourists visiting these facilities (Ali *et al.*, 2013). In the recent decade, a drastic increase is observed in the number of tourists travelling to resort hotels situated in the natural exotic locations to escape from their daily routine life and to enjoy

and entertain themselves. Yang and Chan (2010) states that studying resort hotels are important as it can help the establishments to design better products and services to satisfy the customers, understand their decision-making process and emotions.

The rapid development in this tourism sector makes it very competitive and enforces the resort hotels to develop various marketing strategies for ensuring customer satisfaction (Geissler and Rucks, 2011; Wu and Liang, 2009). Contextually, Gee (2000, p.22) stated that, '*the core principle of the resort concept is the creation of an environment that will promote and enhance a feeling of well-being, enjoyment and satisfaction*'. Moreover, empirical studies in hospitality industry observed that customer satisfaction can be ensured by eliciting positive emotions (Lin and Liang, 2011; Kincaid *et al.*, 2010) and provision of memorable service experiences (Hou *et al.*, 2013). In this regard, Hosany and Witham (2010) posited that customer experience can effect their emotions and satisfaction levels and also develops a competitive advantage for service providers that is difficult to imitate.

An initial conceptualisation of customer experience was developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) who proposed four dimensions of customer experience including education, entertainment, escapism, and esthetics. Their conceptualisation is based on the argument that customers no longer assess the functional and technical attributes of the service quality (Gentile *et al.*, 2007); Rather, they look for affective memories to create a holistic personal experience that dazzle their senses, engage them personally, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds, while indulging in fantasies, feelings and fun (Hosany and Witham, 2010). This concept served as base for a number of studies focusing on the understanding of consumer experiences (Gentile *et al.*, 2007). However, with a few exceptions, research on the measurement and application of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) dimensions of customer experience remain sparse (Hosany and Witham, 2010). Contextually, Oh *et al.* (2007) developed a measurement scale and tested it in bed-and-breakfast industry. Later, this scale was tested

by Hosany and Witham (2010) in the context of cruise holidays, however, they called for further research to validate this measurement scale in other service contexts and test its relationship with consumer consumption evaluations. Therefore, this study aims to validate Oh *et al.*'s (2007) measurement model in the context of resort hotels and examine the effects of four realms of customer experience on customer emotions and satisfaction levels. Specific objectives of the study include (i) to validate the experience economy scale proposed by Oh *et al.* (2007); (ii) to examine the effect of experience economy dimensions on customer emotions; and (iii) to examine how these customer emotions develop customer satisfaction.

A report published by www.ey.com titled as "Global Hospitality Insights 2014" stated that the changes in leisure travel preferences and the rise of emerging markets has resulted in bookings for resort hotels increasing at a much higher rate than the industry average. Yet, it is very surprising that, despite being one of the fastest growing tourism industries, resort hotels are often overlooked by the researchers (Ali *et al.*, 2013). In this context, Line and Runyan (2012) reviewed 274 articles published in four top hospitality journals from 2008 to 2010. In their review paper, they state that resort hotels are the least studied comprising only 0.7% of the total industry studied. However, the presence of research targeting this industry in top hospitality journals suggests its relevance to the field (Ali *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, this study is conducted in the context of resort hotels.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The first section consists of the theoretical background and concepts that are central to the study followed by the conceptual model and discusses the relationships among model elements. The next section narrates the research methodology and data collection. The last part consists of the findings, implications, and suggestion for future research directions.

Conceptual Background of the Study

Experience Economy

Experience economy is used as an overarching concept for service providers in leisure and

recreation industry whose primary goal is providing high quality experiences (Heintzman, 2012; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). The concept of experiences were introduced by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 132) who stated that, '*experiences trigger a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun*'. Pine and Gilmore (1999) further explored the concept of experiences by coining the term, 'experience economy', which is the final phase of economic progression that has developed from commodity, product and service economy. Experience economy is the final stage where the service providers focus on staging unforgettable satisfactory experiences (Wong, 2013; Olsson *et al.*, 2012) by adding value to their offerings in order to be successful (Berry *et al.*, 2002). In this context, Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 12) defined experience as '*events that engage individuals in a personal way*'; whereas Oh, Fiore and Jeong (2007, p. 120) define experiences as, '*enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events*'.

While discussing experience economy, Pine and Gilmore (1998) identified four realms of customer experiences including entertainment, education, esthetic and escapism. These four dimensions are differentiated across two axes i.e., the degree of customer involvement and the connection of customer with the surroundings (Hosany and Witham, 2010). Customer involvement can either be active referring that customer is consuming and producing the service i.e., rafting, rock climbing etc., or it can be passive referring that customer is not physically involved and rather mentally involved in the experience i.e.,

theatre, museum etc., (Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). With regards to the connection of customer with surroundings, it is divided into two points, i.e., absorption or immersion. Absorption suggests that the customer has a certain distance to the stage or the experience (e.g., watching a movie) while immersion indicates that the customer gets 'drawn in' the experience; as shown in Figure 1.

In tourism and leisure industry, most of the offerings are related to the tourists' experience of visiting, observing, watching, enjoying, learning and living different life modes (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Walls *et al.*, 2011; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). Consequently, everything that a tourist gets is a perception, emotional or behavioural experience offered by the tourism and leisure service providers (Oh *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, Sternberg (1997, p. 954) posits that '*tourists are tourist because they want to compensate for their secular, disenchanted mundane lives through a temporary exposure to the other—to the adventurous, foreign, ancient, or spectacular. Tourism establishments make it their business to shape, package and sell such experiences*'. Therefore, the challenge for the marketers is to grasp the distinctive characteristics of tourists (Perdue, 2002) and provide them with experiences that are unique, emotionally charged, and of high personal value (Hosany and Witham, 2010).

Various researchers have studied the tourist experience from many perspectives, however, Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four dimensions of experience including entertainment, education, esthetic and escapism has attained much more

Figure 1. *Dimensions of Experience (adapted from Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 30)*

prominence and attention (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). The first dimension is entertainment which is developed when passive absorption is observed by the customer such as watching a theatre performance (Oh *et al.*, 2007). It is one of the oldest forms of experiences and transpires when participants observe performances and activities of others (Hosany and Witham, 2010). The second dimension is esthetic where the customer has a passive participation and immersion in the experience. Examples for esthetic dimensions include a beautiful arrangement of historical relics in a museum, an attractive servicescape or ambience in a resort hotel or experiencing the breath-taking scenery of Niagara Falls (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). For esthetic experiences, according to Oh *et al.*, (2007) participants are expected to enjoy the experience without changing the environment presented to them. The third dimension is education which refers to an experience where the participant actively participates but is in absorption such as snorkelling, scuba diving or ski-schools. Pine and Gilmore (1999) state that in educational experiences, participants are expected to increase their skills or knowledge. Oh *et al.* (2007) provides an example of a Living History Farm where parents and children go together and attend demonstrations of historical farm skills, such as rope making, spinning, weaving, wood carving, and chair caning etc. The fourth and the last dimension is escapism which happens when the participant is affecting the actual performances in the real or virtual environment for example, by rafting or playing in a casino (Hosany and Witham, 2010). According to Oh *et al.* (2007), participants who engage in escapism experience usually want to take a break from their everyday routine and escape for a while. To summarise, it can be stated that entertainment experience is about feeling, the educational experience learning, the esthetic experience presence, and the escapist experience doing influence customers' emotions and satisfaction levels (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011; Hosany and Witham, 2010; Oh *et al.*, 2007). Many scholars in service marketing have applied experience economy to investigate the multi-layered system of consumer experience (Hosany and Witham, 2010; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011).

Considering that resort hotel is an experience-oriented industry sector, experience economy concept is a logical choice in the assessment of consumer behaviour while visiting resort hotels.

Emotions

Customer emotion has been studied as a central element by the researchers while investigating perceptions of service experiences (Lin and Liang, 2011). For example, Bagozzi *et al.* (1999, p. 184) define emotion as '*a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically; and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and the person having it*'. Similarly, Ortony, Chore and Collins (1987) state that emotion is an internal mental state. Considering these definitions, Farber and Hall (2007) discusses three characteristics of emotions. Emotions are considered as internal mental state and this notion is supported by many researchers (Petzer and Meyer, 2012; Teller and Dennis, 2012; Svavi *et al.*, 2011; Palmer, 2010; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Mehrabian and Russell, 1979). Secondly, emotions are not cognitive state, rather are affective states of subjective feelings (Rose *et al.*, 2012; Jang *et al.*, 2011; Jang and Namkung, 2009). The last characteristic of emotions is that they are incited due to some stimuli and episodic in nature (Plutchik, 2003). In this context, Burns and Neisner (2006) emotions are considered to be a person's positive (pleased, relaxed, etc.) and negative (nervous, annoyed, etc.) feelings. This study also adopts the definition of emotions as the affective responses triggered by customer's experience.

The emotional responses elicited during the experiences are described either by expressions, such as joy, anger, sadness, guilt, and fear, or by emotional categories, such as pleasantness/unpleasantness, relaxation/action, or calmness excitement (Russell, 1979). Studies by Bitner (1992), Ladhari (2009) and Pareigis *et al.* (2011) also support the notion that various facets of customer experience develops customers' emotional responses.

Similarly, Jani and Han (2011) conducted a research in hospitality industry and observed that customer emotions are strongly influenced by the service-encounter performance. This discussion thus concludes that customer experiences may influence the emotional states of the customers. It is therefore, hypothesised as:

Hypothesis 1: Educational experience has a positive and significant influence on emotions.

Hypothesis 2: Entertainment experience has a positive and significant influence on emotions.

Hypothesis 3: Esthetic experience has a positive and significant influence on emotions.

Hypothesis 4: Escapism experience has a positive and significant influence on emotions.

Customer Satisfaction

Service providers in every industry strive for customer satisfaction because of its impact on their performance and profits (Ali and Amin, 2014; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Jani and Han, 2011; Nadiri and Hussain, 2005). Because of its benefits and impacts on service providers, numerous researchers have studied its conceptualisation and measurement (Wong and Dioko, 2013; Slatten *et al.*, 2011). It is mostly conceptualised as the difference of customers' expectations and service providers' performance (Ryu *et al.*, 2012). Oliver (1997, p. 13) defines customer satisfaction as '*a judgment that a product, or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment*'. Another conceptualisation is presented by Day (1984, p. 497) who considers satisfaction as a cognition and defines it as '*a post-choice evaluative judgment concerning a specific purchase selection*'. Also customer satisfaction is considering it as an emotional response (Jani and Han, 2011; Han and Back, 2007). For instance, Westbrook and Oliver (1991) posit that satisfaction is a post-choice evaluative judgment concerning a specific purchase selection using four emotions-laden items to study customer satisfaction. Oliver (1997, p. 319) also supports this notion and states that '*emotion coexists alongside various cognitive judgments in producing satisfaction*'. This study also considers customer satisfaction as a central element to understanding customer consumption experiences.

In terms of its determinants, many researchers have observed the significance of emotions on customer satisfaction (Clemes *et al.*, 2011; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ladhari, 2009; Martin *et al.*, 2008; Oliver, 1997; Mano and Oliver, 1993; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; Westbrook, 1987). Lin and Liang (2011) investigated the extent to which emotions influence customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. They stated that emotions affect customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions positively. Han and Back (2007) investigated the influence of positive and negative emotions on customer satisfaction and found the same results. The results are also supported by other researchers (Ali and Amin, 2014; Lin and Mattila, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2009; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ladhari, 2009; Martin *et al.*, 2008; Burns and Neisner, 2006). This discussion thus concludes that emotions may influence the satisfaction of the customers. It is therefore, hypothesised:

Hypothesis 5: Emotion has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

The target population for this study was limited to those guests who had stayed at resort hotels in Malaysia for at least once. The survey was conducted through face-to-face interaction with the guests at two tourist spots of Malaysia i.e., Langkawi and Penang. Resorts in Malaysia are competitive and establishes greater competitive advantages in Langkawi and Penang during September – November 2013. A self-administered survey was used to collect the using non-probability convenience sampling technique. Data collection was conducted by distributing questionnaires to guests at different times of the day, over three weeks period. Guests were explained with the purpose of the research. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed and after deletion of incomplete responses, 450 questionnaires were deemed complete to use further showing a response rate of 75% from the original target sample population. This sample size is consistent with sample size requirements for SEM (e.g., minimum of 10 respondents for each item in the survey instrument (Chin, 1998a). This sample size also fulfils the condition of necessary sample size of 231 respondents

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=450)

Demographic Characteristic		Percentage
Gender	Male	58%
	Female	42%
Age	Less than 20 Years	3%
	21-30 Years	20%
	31-40 Years	37%
	Above 40 Years	30%
Education Level	Bachelor Degree	53%
	Master Degree	39%
	Others	8%

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

	No. of Items	Mean Score	Cronbach's Alpha
Educational Experience	4	3.62	0.889
Entertainment Experience	4	3.93	0.841
Esthetic Experience	4	3.74	0.731
Escapist Experience	4	3.99	0.880
Emotions	4	3.92	0.808
Customer Satisfaction	4	3.81	0.757

considering the 99% confidence level, standard deviation of 0.5 and +/-1% margin of error (Bulpitt, 1987). Out of these 450 respondents, 58% were male whereas 42% were female. About 3% were between 16-20 years of age, 50% were between 21 and 30 years, 17% were between the ages of 31-40 years and 30% were older than 41 years. About 53% of the total respondents had bachelor degree whereas 37% had a master degree. Demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

The constructs in this study were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale with multiple items. All measurement items validated in previous studies were borrowed and were adapted to match with the aim of this present study. The questionnaire was based on 24-items in total. Dimensions of experience were measured using 4-items each adapted from Hosany and Witham (2010) and Oh *et al.* (2007), who studied the four dimensions (Educational Experience, Entertainment Experience, Esthetic Experience & Escapist Experience) in hospitality industry and find them valid to apply further. Emotions were operationalised also using 4-items adapted from Lin and Liang (2011) whereas customer satisfaction was operationalised also using the

4-items (emotion-laden) proposed by Westbrook and Oliver (1991). All the items were required to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was sent to one (1) hospitality practitioner and two (2) hospitality academics to check the face and content validity. Based on their suggestions, a few modifications were made in the structure of questions.

Since a multi-item scale was used to measure each of the construct, an inter-item analysis is used to verify these scales for internal consistency or reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Specifically, Cronbach alpha was calculated for each scale. All scales were deemed reliable as they surpass the minimum threshold of 0.70 for Cronbach alpha values (Nunnally, 1978) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 also shows the descriptive statistics related to dimensions of customer experiences, emotions and customer satisfaction. Ratings on 'educational experience' (mean=3.62), 'entertainment experience' (mean=3.93), 'esthetic experience' (mean=3.74), 'escapist experience' (mean=3.99), 'emotions' (mean=3.92), and 'customer satisfaction'

(mean=3.81) represents that respondents' agreed to the questions asked.

Findings

For this study, hypotheses were tested based on structural equation modelling using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. In order to conduct the analysis, Smart PLS M3 Version 2.0 (Ringle *et al.*, 2005) software was used. Bootstrapping technique was applied to determine the significance levels of the loadings, weights, and path coefficients.

Following the procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), validity and goodness of fit of measurement model was estimated before testing the structural relationships outlined in the structural model.

Measurement Model

First, the measurement model was tested for convergent validity. This was assessed through factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Table 3 shows that all item loadings

Table 3. Validity and Reliability for Constructs

Measurement Items		Loadings	CR ^a	AVE ^b
Education Experience				
Ed1	The experience has made me more knowledgeable	0.882	0.924	0.753
Ed2	I learned a lot during my experience	0.883		
Ed3	It stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	0.874		
Ed4	It was a real learning experience	0.831		
Entertainment Experience				
En1	Activities at the resort were amusing to watch and perform	0.795	0.899	0.689
En2	Activities at the resort were captivating to watch and perform	0.858		
En3	Activities at the resort were entertaining to watch and perform	0.862		
En4	Activities at the resort were fun to watch and perform	0.803		
Esthetics Experience				
Es1	I felt a real sense of harmony	0.848	0.917	0.735
Es2	Just being here was very pleasant	0.881		
Es3	The setting was very attractive	0.870		
Es4	The setting really showed attention to design detail	0.830		
Escapism Experience				
Ec1	I felt I played a different character here	0.875	0.941	0.800
Ec2	I felt like I was living in a different time or place	0.908		
Ec3	The experience here let me imagine being someone else	0.892		
Ec4	I totally forgot about my daily routine	0.903		
Emotions				
E1	I have felt peaceful during my stay at this resort hotel	0.825	0.873	0.632
E2	I have felt happy during my stay at this resort hotel	0.797		
E3	I have felt relaxed during my stay at this resort hotel	0.832		
E4	I have felt relieved during my stay at this resort hotel	0.722		
Customer Satisfaction				
CS1	I am satisfied with my decision to stay in this resort.	0.764	0.846	0.579
CS2	My choice to stay in this resort was a wise one.	0.790		
CS3	I think I did the right thing when I chose to stay in this resort.	0.767		
CS4	I feel that my experience with this resort has been enjoyable	0.722		

^a Composite reliability = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / [(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)]

^b AVE = (summation of squared factor loadings)/(summation of squared factor loadings) (summation of error variances)

exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Chin, 1998). Composite reliability values, which depict the degree to which the construct indicators indicate the latent construct, exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2006) while average variance extracted, which reflects the overall amount of variance in the indicators accounted for by the latent construct, exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

The next step was to assess the discriminant validity, which refers to '*the extent to which the measures are not a reflection of some other variables*' and it is indicated by the low correlations between the measure of interest and the measures of other constructs (Ramayah *et al.*, 2013; p. 142). Table 4 shows that the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) of each construct is larger than its corresponding correlation coefficients pointing towards adequate discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). To conclude, the measurement model showed an adequate convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Structural Model

SmartPLS 2.0 was used to test the structural

model and hypotheses (Ringle *et al.*, 2005). A bootstrapping procedure with 2000 iterations was performed to examine the statistical significance of the weights of sub-constructs and the path coefficients (Chin *et al.*, 2008). As PLS does not generate overall goodness of fit indices, the R² is the primary way to evaluate the explanatory power of the model (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). However another diagnostic tool is presented by Tenenhaus *et al.* (2005) to assess the model fit and is known as the goodness of fit (GoF) index. The GoF measure uses the geometric mean of the average communality and the average R² (for endogenous constructs). Hoffmann and Brinbrich (2012) report the following cut-off values for assessing the results of the GoF analysis: GoF_{small} = 0.1; GoF_{medium} = 0.25; GoF_{large} = 0.36. For the model used in this study, a GoF value of 0.558 is calculated which indicates a very good model fit as shown in Table 5.

Following the measurement model and goodness of fit, the hypothesized relationships in the structural model were tested. Figure 2, shows the results of the analysis. The corrected R²s in the figure refer to the

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Customer Satisfaction	0.761					
Education	0.599	0.867				
Emotions	0.627	0.580	0.795			
Entertainment	0.610	0.773	0.630	0.830		
Escapism	0.587	0.617	0.587	0.605	0.894	
Esthetics	0.502	0.435	0.510	0.456	0.508	0.857

Table 5. Goodness of Fit Index

	AVE	R ²
Customer Satisfaction	0.5795	0.3937
Education Experience	0.7529	
Emotions	0.6324	0.4982
Entertainment Experience	0.6893	
Escapism Experience	0.8003	
Esthetics Experience	0.7352	
Average Scores	0.6983^a	0.4459^b
AVE * R ²	0.311	
$(GOF = \sqrt{AVE \times R^2})$	0.558	

explanatory power of the predictor variable(s) on the respective construct. All four dimensions of customer experience explains 49.8% per cent of their emotions ($R^2 = 0.498$), whereas emotions of customer explains 39.4 per cent of customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.394$). In regard to model validity, Chin *et al.* (2008) classified the endogenous latent variables as substantial, moderate or weak based on the R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, or 0.19 respectively. Accordingly, both emotions ($R^2 = 0.498$) and customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.394$) can be described as moderate.

The complete results of the structural model and hypotheses testing are presented in Table 6. The results show a strong support for all the five hypotheses of the study. H1 was

hypothesizing that educational experience will influence customer emotions positively and significantly. The results show a strong support for this hypothesis (H1: $b = 0.105$, $t = 1.980$, $\text{sig} < 0.05$). Similarly, H2 hypothesised that entertainment experience will influence customer emotions positively and significantly. The results show a strong support for this hypothesis (H2: $b = 0.320$, $t = 4.499$, $\text{sig} < 0.01$). A strong support was also found for H3 and H4 hypothesising the positive and significant effect of esthetic experience and escapist experience on customer emotions (H3: $b = 0.204$, $t = 4.082$, $\text{sig} < 0.01$; H4: $b = 0.225$, $t = 4.025$, $\text{sig} < 0.01$). These results are consistent with the study conducted by Hosany and Witham (2010) who observed a significant influence of dimensions of customer

Figure 2. Results of the Structural Model

Table 6. Structural Estimates (Hypotheses Testing)

Hypothesis	Standard Beta	Standard Error	T Statistics	Decision
H1 Education → Emotions	0.105	0.072	1.98*	Supported
H2 Entertainment → Emotions	0.320	0.071	4.499**	Supported
H3 Escapism → Emotions	0.225	0.055	4.082**	Supported
H4 Esthetics → Emotions	0.204	0.051	4.025**	Supported
H5 Emotions → Customer Satisfaction	0.627	0.034	18.358**	Supported

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

experience over their emotions. Similarly, other researchers such as Bitner (1992), Ladhari (2009) and Pareigis *et al.* (2011) also supports the notion that various facets of customer experience develops customers' emotional responses. Similarly, Jani and Han (2011) conducted a research in hospitality industry and observed that customer emotions are strongly influenced by the service-encounter performance. The last hypothesis was H5, which hypothesises positive and significant effect of emotions on customer satisfaction. The results strongly support this hypothesis (H5: $b = 0.627$, $t = 18.358$, $\text{sig} < 0.01$). These results are consistent with the previous studies. Lin and Liang (2011) investigated the extent to which emotions influence customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. They stated that emotions affect customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions positively and significantly. Han and Back (2007) also investigated the influence of positive and negative emotions on customer satisfaction and found the same results. The results are also supported by other researchers (Ali and Amin, 2014; Lin and Mattila, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2009; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ladhari, 2009; Martin *et al.*, 2008; Burns and Neisner, 2006).

Common Method Variance

Common method variance refers to '*variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the construct of interest*' (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; pp. 879). It may exist due to the single survey method used to collect responses (Hair *et al.*, 2006). This variance was addressed by following the guidelines provided by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) and presented the survey items (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). At the data analysis stage of the study, Harman's (1967) one-factor test was also applied to control the common method variance. All the items of the study were entered into a principal component analysis with varimax rotation to assess if a single factor emerges from the factor analysis accounting for more than 50 percent of the co-variation. The results indicated that there was more than one factor that accounted for the majority of covariance and it does not appear to be a common method bias concern in the present study.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

Based on the concepts of experience economy presented by Pine and Gilmore (1998), Oh *et al.* (2007) developed a scale for measurement of tourists' experiences and tested it in bed and breakfast accommodation. Hosany and Witham (2010) tested this scale in cruise ship industry and call for further validation of the scale in other facets of hospitality contexts. They also suggested to investigate the mechanisms of how tourist experiences can elicit customer emotions. Considering this research call, this study aimed to examine the effects of four realms of customer experience on customer emotions and satisfaction levels in resort hotels. Data was collected from the guests of Malaysian resort hotels. Structural equation modelling based on partial least squares method was used to analyse the data and test the relationships between the constructs. Overall, the findings of this study enhance the understanding of experience economy concepts in resort hotels and their effect on emotions and satisfaction of customers. The study implications are discussed below and future research areas are highlighted.

Results from this study indicate that customer experiences can be classified in four dimensions including entertainment, education, esthetic and escapism. Analysis of the data proves reliability and validity of all the four dimensions of customer experience. More specifically, the findings of this study establish the viability and generalizability of Oh *et al.* (2007) and Hosany and Witham's (2010) measurement model in a different consumption situation. However, the difference exists in these four dimensions based on their relative importance in terms of predicting the outcome variables of emotions and customer satisfaction. In contrast to study conducted by Oh *et al.* (2007), the results from this study show that entertainment was the main determinant of customer emotions in Malaysian resort hotels. Entertainment was also considered the second most important determinant of outcome variables in the study conducted by Hosany and Witham (2010) on cruiser experiences. Entertainment is an integral part of a tourism. Moreover, Gee (2000, p.22) states that, '*The core principle of the resort concept is the creation of an*

environment that will promote and enhance a feeling of well-being, enjoyment and satisfaction'. In relative terms, escapism was the second most important dimension in predicting customer emotions in this study. According to Snepenger *et al.*, (2007) and Hosany and Witham (2010), escapism remains an important motivator for vacations and personal travel. Yang and Chan (2010, p. 58) states, that '*to escape from normal life*' as the main motivating factor to visit a resort hotel. The findings of this study suggest that esthetics is the third main determinants to predict customer emotions. Many researchers have discussed the influence of esthetics and physical environment on customer emotion in any service setting (Pareigis *et al.*, 2011; Ladhari, 2009; Bitner, 1992). Similarly, Oh *et al.* (2007) and Hosany and Witham (2010) declare esthetics as the main determinant of experiential outcomes. A service setting's physical environment is comprised of a variety of different elements including the esthetics and ambient factors such as color, air, scent, illumination, facilities, layout (Lin and Liang, 2011; Han and Ryu, 2009; Baker *et al.*, 1994). These factors are all interrelated and they work together (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) to influence consumer behavior holistically, not as separate individual factors (Bitner, 1992). For example, in-store experiences developed by the physical environment also trigger customer emotions (Lin and Liang, 2011). In this context, customer's emotions are influenced by both the design and the ambient factors of physical environment that generates excitement among the customers (Harris and Ezech, 2008). Richardson (2000) identified two characteristics of a resort hotel including sufficient indoor amenities encompassing pleasant physical environment and convenient entertainment facilities. The second key characteristic of the resort hotel is its location which is in a unique vacation spot that is desirable because of its climate, scenery, and recreational attractions. For both these two characteristics, esthetics remain an integral part (Mill, 2008). With regards to the educational dimension, while various resort hotels offers some opportunities for the guests to increase their knowledge and skills (e.g., massage techniques, cooking lessons), such experiences were of little importance in predicting customer emotions.

Findings from different studies suggest that the four dimensions of customer experience have differences in terms of their relative importance to predict different outcomes. Therefore, marketers should understand these differences as they offer practical implications for implementing segmentation and positioning strategies based on experiences of customers (Hosany and Witham, 2010).

The results also found that customer emotions are very strong predictors of customer satisfaction in resort hotels. These findings are all in line with the previous studies who observed that emotions evoked during the consumption experience influence satisfaction judgements (Ali and Amin, 2014; Pareigis *et al.*, 2011; Hosany and Witham, 2010; Lin and Mattila, 2010; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Ladhari, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2009; Martin *et al.*, 2008; Burns and Neisner, 2006; Bitner, 1992;). Oliver (1997) states that a strong theoretical support regarding the link between positive emotion and customer satisfaction is evident. While assessing a service experience, customers basically draw on their emotional state and any change in this emotional state influences their satisfaction levels (Lin and Liang, 2011). Psychology literature has demonstrated that emotions can affect evaluative processes (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Consumers' emotions and evaluations are observed to have a strong correlation with customer satisfaction (Burns and Neisner, 2006).

Resort hotels are becoming one of the fastest segments of tourism attractions around the world because a drastic increase has been seen in the number of people travelling to resort hotels situated in the natural exotic locations to escape from their routine life and enjoy and entertain themselves (Ali *et al.*, 2013). The fast development in this tourism sector makes it very competitive and forces the resort hotels to develop various strategies for attracting and retaining customers by differentiating themselves from competitors (Mill, 2008). At the same times, resort hotels are facing the challenge of understanding customer experiences and the resulting post consumption evaluations. The findings from this study provide some insight on the

customer experience dimensions and their relationship with emotions and customer satisfaction. More specifically, the study validates a measurement scale to examine resort hotels' guest's experiences along the four dimensions. This can help the management of resort hotels to develop suitable promotional and marketing campaigns. For instance, resort hotels should emphasize the educational, esthetic, escapist, and entertaining values of the stay at their resort. The pre-consumption performance (advertisements) and during-consumption service performance of the resort hotels must elicit positive emotions of the guests as these are the string predictors of customer satisfaction. In addition, resort hotels should focus on developing attractive and esthetically pleasing environments as these are significant in developing memorable experiences. This offer additional support that resort hotels in Malaysia needs to consider physical environment as an effective marketing strategy in order to appeal to customers from other Asian or Western counties. Similarly, having a good quality services would be in vain if the physical environment is not attractive and well maintained, since a bad physical environment can change customers, perception of the actual service quality levels resulting in negative behavioral intentions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite of enhancing our understating of experience economy concept in resort hotels, this study entails some limitations. This study was only conducted in resort hotels located in two Malaysian popular tourist spots (Langkawi and Penang). Conducting a similar study on resort hotels guests' at other locations in Malaysia may provide fruitful insights and it will help this study in generalisability of the results. Owing to the sample size, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the wider resort hotels guest population. Future research could also test the validity of the measurement scale of customer experience in other service settings such as package holidays, self-catering villas, classic luxury hotels and wildlife adventure tourism etc. Moreover, most of the recent studies have focused on customer experience using generic dimensions, however,

holistic approach to study factors of customer experience are yet to be studied empirically. Therefore, future studies emphasizing on the identification of factors of customer experience may be useful to find new dimensions of customer experience specific to different contexts. The findings of this study indicated that customer experience dimensions elicit emotions in customers. Future studies can investigate the effects of customer experience on different types of emotions such as joy, pleasure, and love. Moreover, future studies might also consider how people having different characteristics perceive service experience and its effect on their emotions and behaviours. Moreover, in terms of the antecedents of customer satisfaction, this study only considered customer experience and emotions. However, there might be other factors that can influence customer satisfaction. Hence, future studies can also incorporate other factors such as perceived price and perceived social interaction etc. Finally, this research has sought to understand the resort hotel experience dimensions using an existing measurement model. It might be interesting to develop other items for assessment of other attributes and aspects of the resort hotel experience.

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