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Abstract

The study investigates the relationship between the three components of perceived quality (service quality, food quality and restaurant atmospherics), positive emotions, and behavioral intentions. By testing competing structural models on a sample of international tourists to casual dining restaurants on the French Riviera, we found that positive emotions have a strong influence on behavioral intentions. Competing paths between service quality, food quality, and restaurant atmospherics with positive emotions were found. The results hold important theoretical and managerial implications for service providers and encouraging international visitors to revisit and recommend restaurants on the French Riviera.

Keywords - Service quality, food quality, atmospherics, emotions, casual-dining, French Riviera

Introduction

Many factors influence customers' behavioral intentions in the restaurant industry (Jani & Han, 2011). The most researched antecedents of behavioral intentions are service quality, image, perceived value, and satisfaction (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2008; Roest & Rindfleisch, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012). Limited research exists on emotions in the context of food services. Specifically, the restaurant experience can also elicit emotions, negative and positive, such as anger, disappointment, happiness, joy, pleasure, and excitement (Lin & Mattila, 2010; Namkung & Jang, 2008). The role and influence of affect and cognition on behavioral intentions have been studied for services in general (Smith & Reynolds, 2009) but limited attention has been devoted to casual dining restaurants (Jani & Han, 2011; Kincaid et al., 2010). More recently, some studies confirm that perceived quality is an important antecedent of affect in restaurants (Ha & Jang, 2010; Kincaid et al., 2010; Namkung & Jang, 2010). However, the relationship between the three components of perceived quality (food quality, service quality, and restaurant atmospherics) is not without controversy. In some studies (e.g., Baker et al., 1994; Ha & Jang, 2010; Wall & Berry, 2007) restaurant atmospherics have been treated as antecedents of food quality and service quality. In others, restaurants atmospherics, food quality, and service quality are the components of perceived quality (Jang & Namkung, 2009, Ryu et al., 2012). Likewise, the structural path between perceived quality and behavioral intentions in restaurant settings remains problematic. Some authors (e.g., Ryu et al., 2012) suggest an indirect path via either customer perceived value or satisfaction, while others

(e.g., Kincaid et al., 2010) suggest a direct path between the two constructs. Contradictory structural paths between food quality and restaurant atmospherics, and perceived quality and behavioral intentions, highlight the need for assessing competing models of these constructs. Nunkoo et al. (2013) conclude in their review of structural models that the evaluation of competing models within tourism and hospitality research remains under-utilized. Different theoretical perspectives can be evaluated using competing SEM models.

Accordingly, this study aggregates the fragmented insights from previous studies and presents three competing conceptual models. The models integrate the various components of perceived quality (food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality) and evaluate their relationship with positive emotions and behavioral intentions. The three conceptual models are based on the premise that consumers increasingly evaluate consumption experiences in a holistic manner (Lin & Mattila, 2010) and that cognition precedes emotions and behavior (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Kincaid et al., 2010; Lazarus, 1991; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Wirtz et al., 2000). The first model (Figure 1) proposes that food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality are antecedents of positive emotions. In turn, these emotions determine behavioral intentions. Figure 1 depicts relationships that are most commonly reported in the literature (Jang & Namkung, 2009) and hence considered the base line model against which the competing models are evaluated. In the second conceptual model (Figure 2), based on previous studies examining the effects of physical surroundings on service evaluations (Bitner, 1990; Lin & Liang, 2011; Ryu & Han, 2011; Zeithaml et al., 1993), restaurants atmospherics can be conceptualized as an antecedent of food and service quality (Ha & Jang, 2010). The remaining conceptual paths are similar to the base line model. In the third

model (Figure 3), building on the first model, direct relationships between the components of perceived quality and behavioral intentions are introduced as depicted in the literature (Kincaid et al., 2010; Smith & Reynolds, 2009). However, satisfaction has been omitted from the three conceptual models for two main reasons. First, the positive relationship between perceived quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions is well-established in the marketing literature (Cronin et al., 2000; Zeithaml, et al., 1996). Second, the impact of emotional reactions (positive and negative emotions) in consumption situations on word-of-mouth recommendations and repurchase intentions differ (Soscia, 2007) and may be of more relevance to managers than emotional reactions to satisfaction or dissatisfaction per se (Bagozzi et al, 1999).

By doing so, the contributions of the study are three-fold. First, the influence of positive emotions on the relationship between perceived quality and behavioral intentions is assessed. When emotions or affect are factored in this relationship contradictory findings emerge. In some studies (e.g., Jani & Han, 2011) no direct path is hypothesized between affect and behavioral intentions. In others, only one component of perceived quality, either restaurants atmospherics (e.g., Lin & Liang, 2011) or service quality (e.g., Ladhari et al., 2008), is evaluated on emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Second, we evaluate these relationships in the context of casual-dining restaurants on the French Riviera. The French Riviera is located in the Provence Alpes Cote D'Azur (PACA) region, which is the most visited region by international tourists to France, after Paris Ile de France. Existing studies examine mainly the relationships between perceived quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions or loyalty in upscale restaurants (e.g., Ryu & Han, 2011; Ryu et al., 2012). Third, most of the existing studies on the relationship between perceived quality and behavioral intentions fail to test competing models. The literature

clearly suggests the existence of alternative paths between the components of perceived quality (food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality) and behavioral intentions. By testing alternative models, it is possible to identify the theoretical superiority of one perspective over another (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Findings can highlight to restaurant managers/owners the areas of perceived quality that need attention (e.g., food quality, restaurant atmospherics etc.) but also direct future investments in order to generate positive behavioral intentions.

Theoretical Background

The Components of Perceived Quality

Quality issues in the service industry have been dealt extensively in the tourism and hospitality literature. The general agreement is that perceived quality has a tri-component structure: food, atmospherics and service (Lui & Jang, 2009; Ha & Jang, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012). Some studies (e.g. Berry, et al., 2002; Kincaid, et al., 2010) treat restaurant atmospherics and food quality as sub-dimensions of service quality. Increasingly, the marketing and hospitality literatures suggest that food quality and service atmospherics are dimensions of their own (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Ha & Jang, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012). Yet, along with service quality, food quality and atmospherics may form an overall perceived quality dimension (Jang & Namkung, 2009). Perceived quality is an important determinant of customer satisfaction (Albacete-Saez, et al, 2007; Chow, et al., 2007) and behavioral intentions (Ha & Jang, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012). In fact, perceived quality takes on greater importance when consumers spend extended time in the facility (e.g. restaurants) in comparison to quick transaction services (e.g. bank) (Kincaid et al.,

2010). Hence, in this study we treat perceived quality as comprising the three dimensions of food quality, restaurant atmospherics, and service quality.

The Role of Emotions in Service Consumption Contexts

Affect and emotion are terms that have been used interchangeably in the literature (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Affect, unlike cognition, exemplifies subjective mental feelings that can be experienced through emotions, moods and attitudinal elements. Emotions generally refer to states characterized by episodes of intense feelings associated with a specific referent and instigate specific response behaviors (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Emotions and consumption emotions are distinct (Han et al., 2010). Phillips (1999) argues that consumption emotions can be distinguished from emotions experienced in everyday life. Consumption emotions are more specific, less transient, more intense but narrower than the range of all possible emotions (Phillips, 1999; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Given the consumption context of restaurants, we define consumption emotions as the affective or emotional responses generated from a consumption experience (Phillips, 1999), including both functional (e.g., food temperature) and hedonic (e.g., staff empathy) experiences (Jani & Han, 2011). Evaluations of food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality can generate positive and negative emotions (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Ladhari et al., 2008; Lin & Mattila, 2010). Specifically, positive emotions, if they remained unchanged, can have consistent effects during the service encounter and produce favorable behavioral intentions (Namkung & Jang, 2010). Hence, the sequence (cognition→feeling→behavior) is well accepted in the marketing literature (Erevelles, 1998; Lazarus, 1991; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Wirtz et al., 2000).

Emotions have been measured in several ways in the marketing and psychology literature (Bagozzi et al., 1999). The four most popular scales are Plutchik's (1980) ten primary emotions; Izard's (1977) Differential Emotion Scale (DES); Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance (PAD); and Watson et al.'s (1988) Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS). To date, no consensus exists on the most reliable scale to measure emotions in consumption experiences. For example, contradictory evidence exists on the relationship between emotion and quality evaluation using the PAD scale, given that quality is not necessarily affect-based (Oliver, 1993), while some studies suggest the contrary (e.g., Compeau et al., 1998; Jiang & Wang, 2006). Likewise, arousal enhances the impact of pleasure on satisfaction only when the consumer experiences excitement (Wirtz et al., 2000). Excitement in particular, is a positive emotional state that consists of high levels of pleasure and arousal (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Also, there is no agreement whether uni or bi-polar scales are better for measuring emotions (Babin et al., 1998). Bi-polar scales of emotions remain problematic in the marketing literature given that they allow for ambivalence or joint occurrence of emotions, as well as the indifference or non-occurrence of the elicited emotions (Westbrook, 1987; Babin et al., 1998). Hence, the use of unipolar dimensions that correspond to either positive or negative dimensions is preferred (Abelson et al., 1982; Namkung & Jang, 2010).

In addition, researchers have employed either a *valence based* (few dimensions of positive and negative emotions) approach (e.g., Jang & Namkung, 2009; Ladhari et al., 2008) or *categorical* approach (measuring distinct mental states such as joy, anger, pleasure) (Lerner & Keltner, 2000) to measure emotions. The valence based approach gives a more parsimonious account of emotions felt given that there is no need to distinguish between specific positive and negative

emotions (Lazarus, 1991). The use of summary dimensions such as positive and negative or pleasure and arousal is common in tourism studies (Lee et al., 2008). Restaurants can generate different types of positive and negative emotions but it remains unclear whether categorical or valence based approaches are better or worse in this setting. In casual dining restaurants, for example, Kincaid et al. (2010) measured affect using two bi-polar scales (gloomy/exciting and distressing/relaxing). Peter and Olson (2003) suggest that emotions such as like/dislike, good/bad and favorable/unfavorable are adequate indicators of an emotional experience. Namkung and Jang (2010) used only three positive emotions (joy, peacefulness and refreshment) to assess customer experiences in casual dining restaurants. Han et al. (2010) used three positive emotions (excitement, comfort and romance) and one negative emotion (annoyance) to measure consumption emotions in full service restaurants using multi-item measures for each emotion. Lin and Liang (2011) used single measures of elated, peppy, enthusiastic and excited to form a latent construct of customer emotions. Hence, no unified approach exists in determining the type (positive or negative) and the number of emotions to measure in the restaurant context.

Despite recent studies (e.g., Han et al., 2010) suggesting that multi-item measures for each emotion is necessary, emotions expressed can be characterized in a number of ways, including positive or negative, solitary or a set, and experienced or expressed (Jasso, 2006). In this study, we focus on positive emotions only and employ single item measures similar to other studies (e.g., Lin & Liang, 2011; Namkung & Jang, 2010). In tourists' recollections of their holiday experience, including dining experience, negative emotions are less common due to the 'rosy view' phenomenon (Mitchell et al., 1997). The phenomenon mitigates negative emotional responses in people's retrospective assessment of emotional experiences and magnifies positive

emotional responses (Lee & Kyle, 2012). This may well explain the lack of a path between negative emotions and behavioral intentions commonly found in dining experiences (e.g., Jang & Namkung, 2009) and the focus on positive affect in many studies (e.g., Henning-Thurau et al., 2006; Jani & Han, 2011; Lin & Liang, 2011).

Hypothesis Development (Model 1)

Food Quality & Emotions

Food quality is a critical component of the dining experience (Ha & Jang, 2010; Liu & Jang, 2009; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Sulek & Hensley, 2004) but often overlooked in service quality and satisfaction studies (Namkung & Jang, 2007). The restaurant experience is to a large extent shaped by the various dimensions of food quality such as temperature, freshness, authenticity, menu variety, and food presentation, amongst others (Ha & Jang, 2010; Kivela et al., 2000; Lui & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2007). Food quality is the most important attribute influencing overall restaurant perceived quality (Kim, et al., 2006). In casual-dining restaurants, Mattila (2001) showed that food quality was the strongest predictor of customer loyalty, while food had also a similar effect on affect towards a restaurant (Kincaid et al., 2010). Jang and Namkung (2009) specifically found a positive relationship between 'product' quality and positive emotions in the restaurant setting. Hence, the following hypotheses can be suggested:

H_1: Food quality favorably influences positive emotions

Restaurant Atmospherics & Emotions

Restaurant Atmospherics has been defined as the "perceived quality of the surrounding space" (Liu & Jang, 2009, p.340) and consists of music, lighting, color, scent, aroma and temperature present in a restaurant setting (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009). Restaurant atmospherics influence customer emotions (Reimer & Keuhn, 2005). In the services marketing literature, Bitner (1992) refers to these aspects of the physical environment as the servicescape. When customers enter the service environment, they gain an impression of its quality by experiencing the ambience, noise, décor and activities, amongst others. Mehrabian and Russel (1974) conclude that the physical environment could influence people's emotional responses, which in turn elicits approach or avoidance behavior toward the environment. Lin and Mattila (2010) showed that the servicescape has an impact on customers' emotions such as pleasure. The physical environment itself may produce feelings of excitement, pleasure, or relaxation (Namkung & Jang, 2008). Hence, the physical environment of a restaurant has the ability to trigger emotional responses in customers. Prior studies provide support for the link between the physical environment and positive emotions (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Lin & Liang, 2011; Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2: Restaurant Atmospherics has a direct influence on positive emotions

Service Quality & Emotions

Service quality has been defined as the "customer's judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of the service" (Zeithaml, 1988). Indeed, it is the outcome of the judgment when

customers compare what they expected from a service and what they received as service. In essence, customers compare expectations to perceived performance of the service (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Ha & Jang, 2010; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Most scholars agree that service quality is crucial for service businesses and that it is an important indicator of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Albacete-Saez et al., 2007; Chow et al., 2007). The restaurant business, in particular, has to pay attention to service quality due to high competition and the existence of many replacement goods (Roest & Rindfleisch, 2010). The two main tools that are used to measure service quality are SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and its restaurant-specific derivative, DINESERV (Stevens et al., 1995). Both SERVQUAL and DINESERV are based on five dimensions (tangibility, reliability, empathy, responsiveness and assurance) albeit differences in the importance of these dimensions for restaurant patrons. Various studies support the link between service quality and emotions. Jang and Namkung (2009) showed a positive relationship between service quality and positive emotions. As restaurant patrons service quality perceptions improved, so did their excitement, joy, pleasure and refreshment. During the service encounter, the interactions that customers have with staff are an opportunity for the former to evaluate dimensions such as empathy and responsiveness. These interactions generate affective responses (Jang & Namkung, 2009). Mano and Oliver (1993) showed that favorable service attribute evaluation has a positive influence on customer affect. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis.

H_3: Service quality has a direct influence on positive emotions

Emotions & Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intentions have been described as a set of multiple behavioral or non-behavioral responses that are the outcomes of service evaluation (Cronin et al., 2000). Generally, the concept is considered to include revisit and word-of-mouth intentions that can predict future consumption behaviors of customers (Han & Ryu, 2006; Jani & Han, 2011). Although, the concept of behavioral intentions is disputed due to its low level of correlation with actual behavior, it is generally agreed that behavioral intentions remain a reasonable construct for predicting future behavior (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009; Quelette & Wood, 1998). Prior studies showed that positive emotional responses have a direct influence on behavioral intentions (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Han & Back, 2007; Kincaid et al., 2010; Lin & Liang, 2011). Customers experiencing more positive emotions during a service encounter are more likely to visit and spread positive word of mouth (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Oliver et al., 1997). Customers in the restaurant industry return in order to experience positive emotions linked to hedonic values (Jang & Namkung, 2009). Likewise, Nyer (1997) and Soscia (2007) found that customers who experienced positive emotions in a consumption context are more willing to engage in positive word-of-mouth. Thus, we propose:

H_4: Positive emotions have a direct influence on behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis Development (Model 2)

In model 2 (Figure 2), the conceptual and empirical justifications for hypotheses two, four, five and six are similar to model 1, as they represent similar paths. Previous research has examined the direct impact of atmospherics on customer emotions and behavioral intentions (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Lin & Mattila, 2010; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001). However, initial perceptions of atmospherics may also influence customers' evaluations of the actual service and food in restaurants (Bitner, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1993). In this way, restaurant atmospherics can be considered an antecedent to service and food quality evaluation. Existing studies show that restaurant atmospherics may have a direct influence on consumption emotions and expectations regarding food and service quality (Baker et al., 1994; Wall & Berry, 2007). Hence, we propose:

H_1: Restaurant atmospherics have a direct influence on food quality.

H_3: Restaurant atmospherics have a direct influence on service quality.

Hypothesis Development (Model 3)

Model 3 (Figure 3) is similar to Model 1 with the exception that direct paths are introduced between food quality, restaurant atmospherics, service quality and behavioral intentions. Hence, hypotheses one, two, three and four in Figure 3 are similar to Figure 1.

Food Quality & Behavioral Intentions

Several authors suggest that food quality determines behavioral intentions (Kivela et al., 2000; Lui & Jang, 2009; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). For example, Liu and Jang (2009) found that food quality was a major factor influencing post-dining behavioral intentions. Sulek and Hensley (2004) found that food quality was the most important factor influencing satisfaction and the only one to predict future behavior. Namkung and Jang (2007) analyzed different attributes of food quality and found that although food temperature did not affect behavioral intentions, food presentation, taste and healthy options were significant predictors of intent. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that there is a significant relationship between food quality and behavioral intentions. Hence, we propose:

H_5: Food quality has a direct influence on behavioral intentions.

Restaurant Atmospherics & Behavioral Intentions

The evaluation of the quality of the servicescape has an impact on behavioral intentions (Lin & Mattila, 2010). Indeed, the interior décor and atmosphere significantly impact how long people stay in a restaurant and this in turn influences their consumption patterns and future behavior (Jang & Namkung, 2009). Several studies establish a positive link between restaurant atmospherics and customer behavioral intentions (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Kincaid et al., 2010; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001). Hence, we propose:

H_6: Restaurant atmospherics have a direct influence on behavioral intentions.

Service Quality & Behavioral Intentions

Likewise, there is general consensus that service quality is an important determinant of behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Kivela et al., 2000; Ha & Jang, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Perceptions of high service quality generate positive word-of-mouth and recommendation among customers. Hence, it is reasonable to propose:

H_7: Service quality has a direct influence on behavioral intentions.

Methodology

The Study Site

The French Riviera, also known as the Cote d'Azur, is the Mediterranean coastline of the Southeast of France. While there is no official boundary, the region is normally considered to extend from the Italian border in the east to Saint Tropez in the west. The largest city in the region is Nice. In 2011, the region attracted approximately 5.2 million international visitors who stayed on average 7.9 nights and spent 93 euros per day (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012). International visitors to the area are mainly from Italy (19.9%), UK (17.1%), and Germany (9.9%) and approximately 36% of all visitors are first timers. The reported overall satisfaction among international visitors for holidaying on the French Riviera is high (89%) (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012). The average age of international visitors is 43 years old but more than a third (34%) of all visitors are less than 39 years old. The majority is travelling primarily for leisure purposes (63%) but a notable proportion (16%) is visiting friends and relatives (VFR). In 2011,

the four main cities visited in the region are Nice (43%), Cannes (17%), Antibes (10%), and Monaco (8.4%). The main leisure activities of visitors are beach related (40%), shopping (50%), visiting museums and historical attractions (41%), and dining (90%) (CRT, 2009).

There are more than 600 restaurants in Nice, 300 in Cannes and100 in Antibes, with a variety of specialties including Pizzeria, Traditional European, Seafood, Asian, Indian and Italian, amongst many others. Some restaurants are open year-round while others only open during the summer time, given the seasonality of business in the South of France. In many cases, restaurants make a great part of their income during the summer and thus rely heavily on local and international tourists to make a living (Kelrestaurant, 2008). Among the strong points of differentiation of the region compared to other French regions include service quality and friendliness of staff in restaurants (CRT, 2009). The focus of this study is on casual dining restaurants that offer reasonable prices to international visitors. We define casual dining restaurants as those that are neither fast-food nor Michelin star rated restaurants, ranging from simple local eateries to slightly more upscale sit-down establishments.

Measures

A list of 31 items was identified from the literature (Bolfing, 1989; Chow et al., 2007; Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2007, 2008) to measure the three constructs of food quality, restaurant atmospherics, and service quality, and adapted for the purpose of the study. Food quality was measured using 9 items, restaurant atmospherics were measured using 9 items and service quality measured using 13 items. All

items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from "very dissatisfied" (1) to "very satisfied" (7). A seven-point scale measured three positive emotions (1=Not at all and 7=Very Much) using a unipolar approach (Abelson et al., 1982; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2010). The measured emotions are some of the most commonly experienced in restaurants by international visitors: pleasure (Jiang & Wang, 2006; Lin & Mattila, 2010; Namkung & Jang, 2010), excitement (Han & Back, 2007; Han et al., 2010; Kincaid et al., 2010; Wirtz et al., 2000) and relaxation (Kincaid et al., 2010). The three single measures of emotions were used as indicators of a latent construct of positive emotions in conformance to the valence based approach of emotion measurement (Lee et al., 2008; Lin & Liang, 2011). Behavioral intentions were measured using two items: revisit and recommendation intentions (Han & Ryu, 2006; Jani & Han, 2011; Kincaid et al., 2010). These items were measured on a 7-point scale (1=Very Unlikely and 7=Very Likely). Various demographics such as age, gender, nationality, and educational level, were also measured.

Sample Design and Data Collection

The French Riviera is popular as a destination among the rich and the old, with 36% of all international visitors above the age of 50 (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012). Previous studies (e.g., Prayag, 2012) have focused senior travelers' perceptions and behaviors and dining out remains a favorite activity of both young and old tourists (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012). However, attracting younger tourists is necessary to sustain the economic development of the region (CARF, 2011). Given that dining is a key component of the touristic experience on the French Riviera and the need to understand the younger segment of the international market, the

study focused on visitors that were less than 50 years old. The other parameters of interest for the target population were, visitors must have dined in casual dining restaurants and they must be fluent in English. In the absence of an adequate sampling frame and consistent with previous research (e.g., Jang & Namkung, 2009; Jani & Han, 2011; Ryu et al., 2012), a convenience sampling method was used to select participants for this study. To minimise selection bias, the questionnaire was self-administered in the presence of trained interviewers to a convenience sample of international tourists on beaches in Nice, Cannes, Antibes and around the port of Monaco on different days, including weekends, at different times. Of the 385 international tourists' approached (allowing for 5% error in sampling), 230 filled in the questionnaire, but only 211 were useable, thereby satisfying the minimum sample size requirement of 200 for using SEM (Hair et al., 2005; Nunkoo et al., 2013). The sample comprised more females (60.2%) than males (39.8%). More than half (54%) of respondents were aged between 18 to 24 years old, 25 to 34 years old (31%), and 35 to 50 years old (15.2%). A good spread of nationality was achieved (Italian – 10.9%, British – 12.8%, and German- 17.1%) and a highly educated sample was acquired (96.7% of respondents had completed high school). The sample profile resonates well with official statistics for the French Riviera in terms of education level and nationality (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012).

Findings

Measurement Checks

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) assessed the reliability and validity of all scales. Given that three items (easily read menu, restaurant location is safe, and employee have a nice appearance and are well dressed) had standardized loadings of less than 0.5, they were deleted as per convention (Hair et al., 2005). The overall fit of the CFA is good ($\chi^2_{(467)}$=861.61, p<0.001, CFI=0.92; TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.058) according to the usual conventions (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Nunkoo et al., 2013). All constructs have both alpha and construct reliability values above 0.7, with the lowest threshold of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) at 0.5 (Table 1). All indicators load significantly (p<0.001) and substantively (standardized loading >0.5) on their construct (Kline, 2005), confirming the convergent validity of the measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity was established by using the procedure of Fornell and Larcker (1981) where AVE extracted for each construct should be greater than the squared correlation of all constructs. Comparing all correlation coefficients (Table 2) and squared correlation of coefficients with AVE (Table 2), the results suggest adequate evidence of discriminant validity.

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Food quality and service quality are multi-dimensional constructs that can be modeled as exogenous constructs consisting of multiple items (see Jang & Namkung, 2009; Ryu et al., 2012). Accordingly, analysis of the three structural models using the ML method of estimation

yields good fit (CFI> 0.9, TLI> 0.9, IFI> 0.9, RMSEA< 0.08) statistics (Hair et al., 2005) as per the usual conventions. As shown in Table 3, the results for model 1 provide support for all the four hypotheses. Specifically, food quality (H_1: β=0.259, p<0.001), restaurant atmospherics (H_2: β=0.631, p<0.001) and service quality (H_3: β=0.204, p<0.001) have a direct effect on positive emotions, suggesting that as satisfaction with these factors increases, so does felt positive emotions. The three exogenous factors explained a very high percentage of the variance in positive emotions (SMC=0.856). The strongest factor to contribute to positive emotions is restaurant atmospherics. Positive Emotions (H_4: β=0.701, p<0.001) have a direct effect on behavioral intentions. All hypotheses are supported for model 2. Indeed, restaurant atmospherics have a direct and positive effect on food quality (H_1: β=0.534, p<0.001) and service quality (H_3: β=0.474, p<0.001). Restaurant atmospherics have a direct and positive effect on positive emotions (H_2: β=0.720, p<0.001). Likewise, food quality (H_4: β=0.261, p<0.001) and service quality (H_5: β=0.170, p<0.001) have a direct and strong positive effect on positive emotions (SMC=0.979). Positive emotions have a strong and direct influence on behavioral intentions (H_6: β=0.880, p<0.001). The results for model 3 (Table 3) provide support for all hypotheses, except for the relationship between restaurant atmospherics and behavioral intentions (H_6). Similar to model 1, food quality (H_1: β=0.314, p<0.001), restaurant atmospherics (H_2: β=0.663, p<0.001) and service quality (H_3: β=0.200, p<0.01) have a strong direct effect on positive emotions (SMC=0.783). Positive Emotions have a direct effect on behavioral intentions (H_4: β=0.203, p<0.05). Likewise, model 3 gives credence to direct paths between perceived quality and behavioral intentions. Both food quality (H_5: β=0.565, p<0.001) and service quality H_7: β=0.341, p<0.001) have a direct and positive effect on behavioral intentions. A comparison of

the three models (Table 3) revealed that they are sufficiently and significantly different to be considered as valid competing models.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between perceived quality, positive emotions and behavioral intentions in casual dining restaurants. While many paths in the three theoretical models (e.g., emotions→behavioral intentions and service quality→emotions) have been tested before, competing models linking the many different facets of perceived quality and behavioral intentions remain scarce. Hence, the main contribution of this study was to show how alternative paths exist between components of perceived quality, emotions, and behavioral intentions. Accordingly, the findings have important theoretical and managerial implications.

Theoretical Implications

Generally, the results support a positive relationship between food quality, service quality, restaurant atmospherics and emotions. Unlike the study of Jang and Namkung (2009), we establish a direct effect of food quality on positive emotions and positive emotions on behavioral intentions. Food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality are capable of generating positive emotions such as excitement and pleasure. In turn, positive emotions favorably influence behavioral intentions as reported in other studies (Jani & Han, 2011; Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Lin & Liang, 2011; Oliver et al., 1997; Smith & Reynolds, 2009) but not always confirmed in casual dining restaurants (Kincaid et al., 2010; Namkung & Jang, 2010). Likewise,

restaurant atmospherics as a significant antecedent of positive emotions confirm the role that the servicescape plays in generating emotions (Bitner, 1992).

The relationship between restaurant atmospherics and behavioral intentions still remains ambiguous. Unlike other studies (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009), no significant and direct link was found between restaurant atmospherics and behavioral intentions. Our results only support the indirect effect of restaurants atmospherics on behavioral intentions in line with the study of Kincaid et al. (2010). For casual dining restaurants, improving customers' revisit and recommendation intentions is dependent more on service quality, food quality and positive emotions rather than restaurant atmospherics. However, restaurant atmospherics has the strongest influence on positive emotions in all three models suggesting that restaurateurs should pay particular attention to improving décor, cleanliness, music, scents, and authenticity of the atmosphere if they want diners to have a strong emotional experience that generates favorable behavioral intentions.

Unlike previous studies that considered restaurants atmospherics and food quality as components of service quality (Berry et al., 2002; Kincaid et al., 2010), our findings align with others (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Ryu et al., 2012), suggesting that food quality and restaurant atmospherics must be treated as distinct dimensions of the restaurant experience. Unlike the study of Ryu et al. (2012), we are able to establish service quality as an antecedent of both emotions and behavioral intentions (e.g., Jani & Han, 2011; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Kincaid et al., 2010). We extend the hospitality literature by empirically confirming that restaurant atmospherics can be a significant antecedent of both food quality and service quality.

In line with others (e.g., Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Lazarus, 1991; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001), we support the idea that cognition precedes emotions and behavior in emotion-laden service experiences. We also give further support to the use of unipolar scales to measure emotions (e.g., Abelson et al., 1982; Babin et al., 1998; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2010). Positive emotions such as pleasure, excitement and relaxation are also applicable in the restaurant context as valid indicators of the emotional experience of international visitors.

From a theoretical perspective, a comparison of the goodness-of-fit of the three models (Table 3) suggests that the baseline model (Figure 1) performs better. Food quality, service quality and restaurant atmospherics are antecedents of positive emotions and have an indirect effect on behavioral intentions. These relationships are part of the original model tested by Jang and Namkung (2009). Support is also found for part of these authors' extended model, where food quality and service quality have a direct influence on behavioral intentions (Figure 3). However, our findings do not support a direct relationship between restaurant atmospherics and behavioral intentions. All three models suggest that restaurant atmospherics is the strongest predictor of positive emotions, inferring that atmospherics matters not only in upscale but also in casual dining restaurants.

Managerial Implications

The results also offer several practical implications for casual dining restaurateurs. Restaurateurs can differentiate their service offer by directing attention to attributes of perceived quality that generate positive emotions such as food quality, service quality and restaurant atmospherics. In this way, restaurateurs can trigger positive emotions such as excitement, pleasure and relaxation

that favorably influence behavioral intentions of diners. Alternatively, restaurateurs can also focus on food quality attributes such as food temperature, presentation, taste, freshness, and portions, as well as service quality attributes such as reliability, value for money and staff competency to generate favorable behavioral intentions.

Irrespective of the path that restaurateurs choose to induce positive revisit and recommendation intentions from international visitors, food quality should be part of an established quality control program to ensure the highest standards. Customers are more likely to reward restaurateurs with their loyalty if food quality is able to generate positive emotions. The Mediterranean cuisine of the South of France is certainly popular with international visitors (Observatoire du Tourisme, 2012) but casual dining restaurants are not always part of a quality assessment program, unlike the Michelin star rating used by fine-dining restaurants in France and elsewhere. Given the strength of restaurant atmospherics in generating positive emotions, restaurant owners should seek to create a pleasurable and exciting atmosphere using music, scents and aromas, and lighting effects. They can also add novelty stimulus into the service experience to evoke the most desired emotions (Jiang & Wang, 2006; Nyer, 1997). By ensuring updated décor, clean and comfortable premise, and authentic atmosphere, restaurateurs can indirectly influence customers' behavioral intentions. Restaurateurs should also ensure that staff is friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, and able to make customers feel special to generate positive emotions. Reliability, value for money, price levels and superiority of the service in the restaurants of the French Riviera compared to other similar places remain other important aspects of service quality that directly and indirectly influence word-of-mouth recommendations and revisit intentions.

Limitations and Conclusion

Despite the theoretical and managerial contributions of this study, it is not without limitations. First, the characteristics of the sample and the sampling method do not allow generalization of the results beyond the French Riviera. Second, this study considered only casual dining restaurants. Since the food quality, restaurant atmospherics and service quality might differ in other types of restaurants, it would be worthwhile for future research to explore these relationships in fine dining and fast-food segments. Third, the study is limited to international visitors to only four main cities on the French Riviera. It would be of interest to extend the study to other locations such as St. Tropez and compare this model for different cities of this region. Fourth, the literature recognizes other mediating variables such as restaurant image and perceived value as important in influencing the relationship between perceived quality and behavioral intentions (Ryu et al., 2012), this study is limited only to the influence of positive emotions. Future studies should explore the same relationships but adding other determinants of behavioral intentions and negative emotions. Fifth, the competing models, though less parsimonious than the base line model, also suggest that restaurant atmospherics is critical in generating positive emotions. It would be worthwhile for future studies to explicitly model attributes of restaurant atmospherics such as design and décor, music, and ambiance in evaluating their direct and/or indirect impact on emotions and behavioral intentions.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Model 1

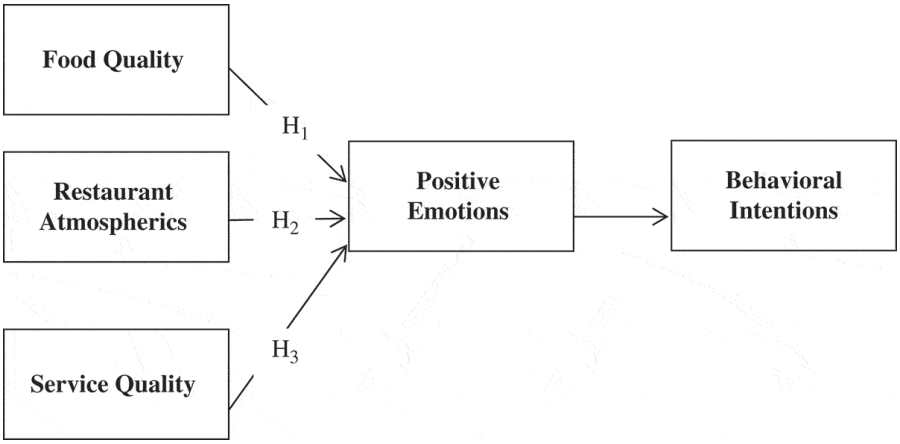

Figure 2: Conceptual Model 2

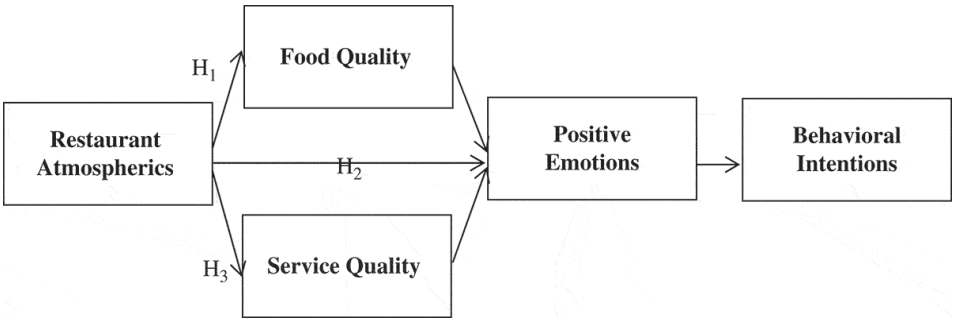

Figure 3: Conceptual Model 3

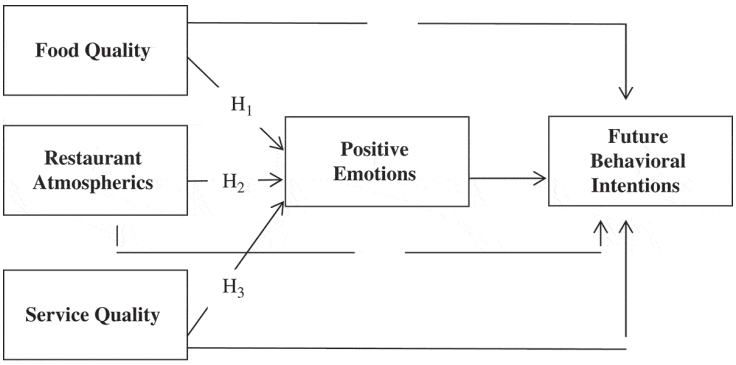

Table 1: Measurement items, reliability and validity values

Construct	Std. Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Construct Reliability	AVE
Food Quality		0.894	0.896	0.520
Temperature of the food	0.753			
Freshness of the food	0.763			
Healthy alternatives	0.686			
Food taste	0.741			
Food portions	0.645			
Menu variety	0.710			
Food authenticity	0.678			
Food presentation	0.784			
Restaurant Atmospherics		0.899	0.906	0.519
Pleasant décor	0.681			
Cleanliness of dining area and bathroom	0.596			
Comfort of dining area	0.671			

Temperature of dining area	0.632			
Music quality	0.776			
Aromas and scents in the establishment	0.798			
Adequacy of the color scheme	0.762			
Lighting effects	0.816			
Authenticity of the atmosphere	0.721			
Service Quality		0.938	0.932	0.568
Accuracy of the bill	0.525			
Price levels of the restaurant	0.713			
Reliability of the order	0.597			
Value for money of the restaurant	0.708			
Promptitude of the service	0.779			
Feeling special in the eyes of the staff	0.827			
Level of personalization of the service	0.846			
Staff competency, dependability and consistency	0.779			
Staff knowledgeable about the menu	0.727			
Staff friendliness and helpfulness	0.877			

Superiority of service in restaurants on the French Riviera	0.784			
Positive Emotions		0.861	0.818	0.603
Relaxation	0.791			
Pleasure	0.824			
Excitement	0.707			
Behavioral Intentions		0.931	0.930	0.874
Likeliness of return to some of the restaurants	0.956			
Likeliness of recommending the restaurants to others	0.909			

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation, inter-construct correlation

Construct	Mean	SD	FQUAL	RATM	SEVQL	AFFEC	FTBEH
FQUAL	5.47	0.754	**1.000**				
RATM	5.22	0.801	0.456**	**1.000**			
SEVQL	4.73	1.072	0.508**	0.457**	**1.000**		
POSEM	5.08	0.946	0.597**	0.735**	0.540**	**1.000**	
BEHIT	5.35	1.40	0.513**	0.256**	0.495**	0.355**	**1.000**

Note: ** significant at the 0.01 level; FQUAL=Food Quality; RATM= Restaurant Atmospherics; SEVQL=Service Quality; POSEM = Positive Emotions; BEHIT=Behavioral Intentions

Table 3: Results of SEM

SEM statistics	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Comparison of Models**
Chi-square (df)	$\chi^2_{(459)}$=763.32	$\chi^2_{(472)}$=898.26	$\chi^2_{(466)}$=866.58	
p-level	p<0.001	p<0.001	p<0.001	
CFI	0.94	0.91	0.92	
TLI	0.93	0.90	0.91	
IFI	0.94	0.92	0.92	
RMSEA	0.056	0.066	0.064	
Δ χ^2 Model 1 vs. Model 2				134.94
Δ df Model 1 vs. Model 2				13
p-level Model 1 vs. Model 2				p<0.01
Δ χ^2 Model 1 vs. Model 3				103.26
Δ df Model 1 vs. Model 3				7
p-level Model 1 vs. Model 3				p<0.01
Δ χ^2 Model 2 vs. Model 3				31.68

Δ df Model 2 vs. Model 3 p-level Model 2 vs. Model 3				6 $p<0.01$