

Experiential marketing, brand image and brand loyalty: a case study of Starbucks

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Abstract

Purpose – Due to the internationalization that has occurred during the past few decades, the living conditions of people around the island of Taiwan have gradually changed, especially their eating habits. Among them, the growth of the coffee market has been very significant. To date, many studies have been devoted to exploring the application of experiential marketing (EM) in a variety of industries. Many experimental results have proven that a positive brand image (BI) will lead to brand loyalty (BL). In services, the best at the practice of EM is Starbucks. Therefore, this paper aims to assess the role of BI in EM and BL for Taiwan's most popular brand, Starbucks.

Design/methodology/approach – In the formal test stage, 225 questionnaires were given to respondents in Starbucks located in four districts (Da-An, Zhong-Zheng, Nei-Hu and Xi-Yin), which have many more stores than the other districts in Taipei City. Two hundred valid samples were obtained. This study used structural equation modelling (SEM) to validate the relationships among EM, BI and BL.

Findings – The findings show that EM cannot directly impact BL as expected, as it needs BI to do so. In other words, BI acts a complete mediator in the relationship between EM and BL.

Practical implications – In this study, BI acts a complete mediator. This means that if Starbucks expects to improve consumers' loyalty to the brand, it only needs to rely on the good overall image of the brand. Facing such business style homogeneity, people need some available information to help them to execute their following purchase decisions. Though Starbucks can bring me to its locations, meaning that Starbucks has made its first move in comparison with other competitors, I still decide to leave without any impressive image of this brand. Accordingly, we can refer to BI as a powerful endorsement of a qualified relationship between EM and BL.

Originality/value – Compared to past studies on Taiwan's/Taipei's Starbucks, this paper simultaneously inputs EM, BI and BL into the model. Though Starbucks has achieved great EM success, this study finds that EM is no longer exclusive to BL, and BI is a powerful endorsement of a qualified relationship between EM and BL. For Starbucks, it must strengthen consumer perceptions of its BI to create customer loyalty.

Keywords Experiential marketing, Brand image, Brand loyalty, Starbucks

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Due to the internationalization that has occurred during the past few decades, the living conditions of people around the island of Taiwan have gradually changed, especially their eating habits. Traditional Chinese pancakes/fritters and congee/soy milk have been gradually replaced by toast/rice burgers and sandwiches/coffee. According to the report released by TVBS News (2016), the yearly market value of coffee is more than 60 billion dollars, while the people of Taiwan drink up to a total of 2.3 billion cups of coffee per year. Similarly, the United Evening News (2017) has stated that the yearly coffee business is worth approximately 70 billion dollars, which is equal to 2.85 billion cups of coffee. The growth rate has been more than 20% in the last two years, meaning that there is still a booming space for the coffee market. In Taiwan, you can see many coffee shops everywhere, including famous coffee chain stores (e.g. Starbucks, Mr. Brown, Barista, 85 Café and Louisa) and other small individual sole-proprietorship brands. Currently, even so-called convenience stores (e.g. 7-11 and Family Mart) have aggressively joined the competition by developing their coffee brands (City Café and Let's Café).



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Today, marketing is “more challenging than ever due to fragmented media, clever and articulated consumers, and the rise of the ‘free-thinking’ consumer” (McCole, 2004, p. 535). In the so-called experience economy today, many studies have been devoted to exploring the application of experiential marketing (EM) in a variety of industries (e.g. Mathwick *et al.*, 2001; Lai and Chou, 2010; Yuan and Wu, 2008). EM is usually broadly defined as any form of customer-focused marketing activity that creates a connection to customers (Schmitt, 2010). In 2015, the production value of the services in Taiwan accounted for 63.5% of GDP. At present, the concept of EM has been widely introduced to many industries, such as sports (e.g. Freitas, 2009), leisure and tourism (e.g. Leighton and Lehman, 2011), medical services (e.g. Consuela-Madalina *et al.*, 2017), airlines (e.g. Alagöza and Ekici, 2014) and luxury goods (e.g. Snakers and Zajdman, 2010). Therefore, EM has undoubtedly become a practical trend among the business world recently.

At present, the brand image (BI) of a company is one of the most important assets that not only establishes a competitive advantage but also helps the company stay in the minds of its customers and results in the loyalty of customers to the company (Deheshti *et al.*, 2016). The essential part of a company’s marketing programme is to sustain BI (Roth, 1995a) and the brand strategy (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). A positive and well-known image is an asset to all companies because the image is a powerful purchase influencer that affects the consumers’ perceptions of the company and its communication (Grönroos, 2002). In service fields, experiences arise when a consumer interacts with atmospheric variables and the personnel of service organizations (Boulding *et al.*, 1993; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Hui and Bateson, 1991). Moreover, many experimental results have proven that a positive BI will lead to brand loyalty (BL) (e.g. Koo, 2003; Ghafoor *et al.*, 2012).

Among these companies, the best at the practice of EM is Starbucks, which can generate a unique customer experience and eventually make great contributions to the brand (Michelli, 2007). To date, Starbucks has successfully become the spokesman of EM by means of exquisite internal decorations, roomy spatial designs, rich and aromatic coffee, soft music, warm light, the staff’s kindly greetings, a comfortable and cheerful leisure atmosphere and so on. To Starbucks, it sells not just coffee but a sense of affection and belonging. Starbucks expects to inspire, respect, invest and support their employees to create a working place with passion, fun and energy to attract, educate and retain customers.

During the most recent decade, extant studies on Starbucks in Taiwan focused on its corporate image (e.g. Tu *et al.*, 2012), brand perception (e.g. Yang *et al.*, 2015), relationship quality (e.g. Hsu *et al.*, 2017), experiential loyalty (e.g. Wu, 2017), friendship/trust (e.g. Chung *et al.*, 2018), interactivity/engagement (e.g. Chung *et al.*, 2017) and experiences (e.g. Liu *et al.*, 2012). Obviously, what consumers feel for Starbucks does not just result in buying their products since consumers might want a relationship and/or an experience. Currently, retail stores are not only creating values for customers but also transforming their behaviour into experiential shopping. Once an individual visits a store and purchases a product/service, the consumption experience helps form an image in a person’s mind, thereby affecting his or her post-visit behaviour (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007).

Facing such a highly homogeneous and mature market, EM seems not to be a prerequisite any more. In contrast, all the marketing efforts (e.g. relationship/social media marketing) made by retail stores to improve the long-term customer relationships (i.e. trust/friendship) and maintain stable re-patronage rates would be an impressive BI for a differentiated strategy from its competitors. Based on the descriptions mentioned above, the main contribution of this paper is choosing the famous international coffee chain brand (Starbucks) as our target and examining the relationships among EM, BI and BL in the homogeneous and mature coffee market in Taiwan. Finally, this paper ends with some discussions, suggestions, managerial implications and conclusions.

Literature review

Experiential marketing (EM)

EM is a guide to building experiences that consumers cannot forget (Batat, 2019). Schmitt *et al.* (2015) were convinced that experiences cannot be bought and can occur after the purchase process as well. Undoubtedly, the trend of consumption is now shifting from commodities, goods and services to experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Vargo and Lusch (2004) suggested that experience and value are perceived purely from the view of an individual and are inherently personal, existing only in the customer's mind. Thus, no two people can have the same experience (Johnston and Kong, 2011). EM is one marketing concept that has been used widely in different industries in recent years. Lee *et al.* (2011) defined EM as a memorable memory or experience that embeds deeply into the customer's mind. McNickel (2004) and William (2006) described EM as initiatives within marketing that provide consumers with adequate information to make a purchasing decision by giving them in-depth tangible experiences. According to Schmitt (1999), EM is how to get customers to sense, feel, think, act and relate with the company and brands. Cuellar *et al.* (2015) described how companies can take advantage of EM and increase their long-term sales and profits.

Schmitt (1999) supposed that EM should focus on the consumption settings available for customers to receive both rational and emotional impetus simultaneously. According to Schmitt (1999, 2000), EM was composed of five subscales, namely, the following: "Sense", "Feel", "Think", "Act" and "Relate". Among them, "Sense" refers to consumers' senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell); "Feel" appeals to customers' inner feelings and emotions; "Think" refers to the intellect in order to deliver cognitive, problem-solving experiences that engage customers creatively; "Act" targets physical behaviours, lifestyles and interactions; and finally, "Relate" creates experiences by taking into account individuals' desires to be part of a social context (Schmitt, 2010, p. 68).

Brand image (BI)

Since 1950s, BI has become a significant concept for customer behaviour research (Riaz, 2015). The central aspect of a brand is its image (De Chenatony and Riley, 1998). The BI holds for the customers a specific offering and influences them to act towards a specific product or service (Keller, 1993). BI is defined as the perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand's associations held in the consumers' memory (Herzog, 1963; Newman, 1957). BI is also referred to as the customers' perception of the reason, rational basis or emotions towards a specific brand (Malhotra, 2010; Cannon *et al.*, 2009; Assael, 2004). Specifically, Dichter (1985) and Newman (1957) define BI as the total set of impressions shaped by consumer interactions (e.g. observations and consumption) with a brand.

Traditionally, scholars have acknowledged the cognitive and affective facets of the experiences associated with BI (e.g. Bullmore, 1984; Dichter, 1985; Gardner and Levy, 1955; Keller, 2001, 2008; Newman, 1957). Of course, some scholars claim that BI is a single-dimensional construct (e.g. MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989; Kwun and Oh, 2007; Ryu *et al.*, 2008). Park *et al.* (1986) identify three facets of BI: symbol, function and experience. Furthermore, BI has been measured based on attributes (e.g. Koo, 2003; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000) or brand benefits/values (e.g. Hsieh *et al.*, 2004; Roth, 1995b; Bhat and Reddy, 1998). Summarizing some scholars' points of view on BI, Wijaya (2013) propose that BI is composed of five dimensions: identity, personality, association, behaviour and attitude and competence and benefit.

Brand loyalty (BL)

A brand-loyal customer is considered to be a company's most valuable customer (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000). In fact, many scholars have acknowledged that the concept of BL has been

undergoing an evolution (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 12). Devi and Menezes (2016) and Severi and Ling (2013) comment that BL increases sales, market shares and profitability, thus helping a business to group or maintain themselves in the marketplace. BL results when brands have gain exclusive, positive and prominent meanings in the minds of large numbers of consumers. Aaker (1991) defines BL as the measure of attachment that a consumer has towards a brand. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) described loyalty as a biased behavioural response expressed over time by a decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and as a function of psychological processes. In early studies, BL was merely defined as repeated purchase behaviour (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Cunningham, 1956; Farley, 1964), whereas recent studies refer to BL as a multi-dimensional concept (Dick and Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Worthington *et al.*, 2009). BL can be either behavioural or attitudinal (Zeithaml, 1988).

Research hypotheses

EM and BL. In the context of hotel marketing, Nurrahmi (2019) suggests that EM would affect the value of experience, where customer satisfaction and the value of experience would influence customer loyalty. Fransisca (2007) says that EM is very effective for marketers to build BL. Many scholars support that EM can improve customer satisfaction (e.g. Tsauro *et al.*, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2011; Alkilani *et al.*, 2013), which subsequently affects customer loyalty (Lee and Chang, 2012). In the context of Korean cosmetic products, Su and Lai (2017) find that e-WOM can influence BL through EM. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. EM has a significant positive impact on BL.

EM and BI. Schmitt (1999) argues that aspects of EM can positively influence BI. Alba and Hutchinson (2000) suggest that personal experience can make consumers have higher familiarity, stronger brand association and deeper BI, thereby strengthening the relationship between the brand and individual. In the study of Oetomo and Budiyanto (2017), they state that BI is a mediator in the relationship between EM and purchase decisions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2. EM has a significant positive impact on BI.

BI and BL. Based on Taiwan's theme parks, Chang *et al.* (2019a, b) argue that destination attachment and destination satisfaction both act as a complete mediator on the destination image–destination loyalty relationship. In the context of the telecommunication sector of Pakistan, Saeed *et al.* (2013) find that a positive and significant relation exists between BI and BL. Tu *et al.* (2012) suggest that BI significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty, thereby considerably influencing BL. Alif Fianto *et al.* (2014) revealed that BI has a significant role in influencing purchasing behaviour. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3. BI has a significant positive impact on BL.

Methodology

Research framework

This study aims to explore the relationships among EM, BI and BL. Based on the literature review described in the previous section, the research framework is drawn as Figure 1.

Operational definitions and measures. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree) was used to measure the constructs. Based on Schmitt (1999), EM is defined as customers developing recognition of and purchasing goods or services from a company or

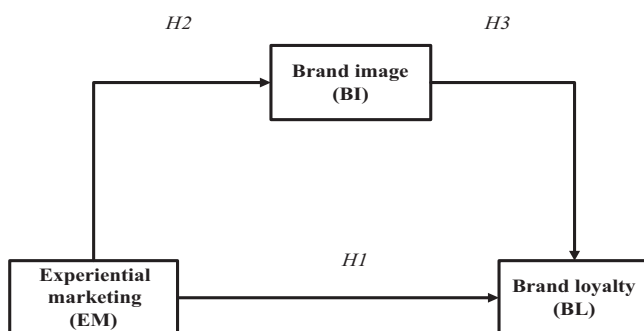


Figure 1. Research framework

brand after they experience activities and perceive stimulations. EM is classified into five dimensions with 22 items. The five categories are Sense, Feel, Act, Think and Relate. The scale of EM is modified from Schmitt (1999) and Gilmore and Pine (2002). Based on Baldinger and Rubinson (1996), we define BL as a customer's preference towards a specific brand according to attitudinal and behavioural aspects. Then, we modify the scale of BL from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Odin *et al.* (2001). BL is a single construct with eight items. As for BI, this paper adopts the concept of Keller (1993). The instrument of BI is adapted from Park *et al.* (1986) with three dimensions (i.e. Function, Symbol and Experience) and 12 items.

Sampling. In pre-test stage, we delivered 100 questionnaires to customers who had visited a Starbucks located in New Taipei City (i.e. Banqiao and Tucheng), and 94 valid responses were collected. The value of Cronbach's α of these constructs/dimensions ranges from 0.610 to 0.934. Although the reliability of "Feel" is lower than 0.7, it is still within the acceptable range (George and Mallery, 2003) [1]. Therefore, the reliability of each construct in this measurement model is considered acceptable and can be used in further analysis. In the formal test stage, 225 questionnaires were given to respondents on site in a Starbucks located in four districts (Da-An, Zhong-Zheng, Nei-Hu and Xi-Yin), which have many more stores than the other districts in Taipei City. After deleting 25 incomplete questionnaires, 200 valid samples were finally obtained.

Analyses and results

Analysis of the sample structure

Based on the 200 valid samples, the analysis of the demographic variables showed the following: (1) gender – the ratio of male/female is approximately three-fifths; (2) age – 36% of the sample is under 20 years old, and 52.5% ranges from 20 years old to 40 years old; (3) educational background – approximately 59.5% of the respondents have a university/college degree; and (4) frequency – 76% of the total visit Starbucks no more than four times a week. As for the sample mean analysis, the means of these variables here are 4.249 (EM), 4.309 (BI) and 3.886 (BL). Therefore, there is still room for these consumers to be more loyal to Starbucks. As for the dimensions of EM, the means of "Act" (4.179) and "Relate" (4.172) are lower than those of the other three, meaning that consumers at present cannot make an obvious response (i.e. "Act" /"Relate") towards the EM of Starbucks.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

This paper aims to explore the relationships among EM, BI and BL. To clearly find the convergence validity of each construct/dimension and/or the model fit using CFA, we examine the relative measurement indices, such as the GFI, CFI, NNFI, SRMR, RMSEA and

normed χ^2 . All the criteria for these indices are shown in [Table 1](#). The item deletion criterion in the CFA procedure is based on an item's standardized parameter value and modification indices. Therefore, EM finally becomes a five-dimensional construct with 14 items, BI is a three-dimensional construct with nine items, and BL is a single-dimensional construct with three items. The indices of the model fit are GFI = 0.84, CFI = 0.94, NNFI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.066, RMSEA = 0.066, and normed $\chi^2 = 1.875$. From these evidences, we conclude that the fit of this measurement model is reasonably acceptable.

Reliability and validity analysis

From [Table 1](#), most of the Cronbach's α values of the constructs/dimensions are greater than 0.7, which indicates that the reliability of our study is acceptable. As for the convergent validity, the t -values of all the items of each dimension range from 7.04 to 14.89 (see [Table 2](#)), meaning that the convergent validity is acceptable. Furthermore, the CR and the AVE range from 0.634 to 0.951 and 0.631 to 0.5848, respectively. According to the concept of [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#), the convergent validity of each construct is acceptable.

Correlation analysis

The results in [Table 3](#) show that the mean of BL (3.845) is smaller than those of EM and BI. It seems that there is still room for improvement in Starbucks today. In addition, the values of the correlations between the factors are significant, but they are not highly correlated. However, the value of the correlation only reveals the degree of the relationship between two constructs. To facilitate a good understanding of the indirect/direct and mediated effects, this study uses structural equation modelling (SEM) to validate the effects among the constructs. Using SEM methodology, our empirical evidence (see [Figure 2](#)) strongly supports the three research hypotheses mentioned previously.

Hypotheses testing

Different from most previous academic studies (e.g. [Fransisca, 2007](#); [Lee and Chang, 2012](#); [Alkilani et al., 2013](#); [Su and Lai, 2017](#)), EM does not have a positive impact on BL ($\gamma_{21} = -0.06$, t -value = -0.21). This means that a higher level of EM provided by a Starbucks owner will not significantly enhance a consumer's perceived loyalty to Starbucks (i.e. **H1** is not supported). In addition, we found that EM may positively impact BI ($\gamma_{11} = 0.80$, t -value = 6.19, $p < 0.005$). This is consistent with [Schmitt \(1999\)](#), [Alba and Hutchinson \(2000\)](#) and [Oetomo and Budiyanto \(2017\)](#), indicating that effective EM from Starbucks truly will help improve its BI (i.e. **H2** is supported). Finally, the results of this study show that BI positively impacts BL ($\beta_{21} = 0.88$, t -value = 2.53, $p < 0.01$), meaning that **H3** is supported.

Constructs	Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's α	
			Dimension	Construct
EM	Sense (1-3)	3	0.895	0.872
	Feel (1-3)	3	0.801	
	Think (1-2, 4)	3	0.734	
	Act (1,3)	2	0.670	
	Relate (3-5)	3	0.777	
BI	Function (1,3-4)	3	0.851	0.780
	Symbol (1-3)	3	0.726	
	Experience (2-4)	3	0.701	
BL	-	3		0.642

Table 1.
Reliability analysis

Construct	Dimension	Factor loading	Standard deviation	t-value	Standardized parameter
EM	Sense	0.52	0.04	14.68***	0.86
		0.56	0.04	14.89***	0.87
		0.48	0.03	14.51***	0.85
	Feel	0.59	0.04	13.10***	0.82
		0.44	0.04	10.75***	0.71
		0.65	0.06	11.53***	0.74
	Think	0.52	0.06	8.98***	0.62
		0.65	0.05	13.02***	0.83
		0.43	0.04	9.82***	0.66
	Act	0.63	0.06	10.03***	0.88
		0.44	0.06	7.29***	0.57
	Relate	0.48	0.05	9.76***	0.67
0.74		0.06	12.26***	0.80	
0.57		0.05	11.04***	0.74	
BI	Function	0.41	0.03	11.85***	0.76
		0.48	0.04	12.93***	0.81
		0.48	0.03	14.06***	0.86
	Symbol	0.58	0.05	11.72***	0.80
		0.55	0.06	9.91***	0.69
		0.38	0.05	7.37***	0.54
Experience	0.39	0.04	9.77***	0.75	
	0.39	0.04	9.09***	0.69	
	0.34	0.05	7.47***	0.57	
BL	0.62	0.07	9.53***	0.70	
	0.47	0.07	7.04***	0.53	
	0.49	0.06	7.85***	0.58	

Table 2.
Convergent validity analysis

	Mean	Standard deviation	(1)	(2)	(3)
EM (1)	4.253	0.4469	1		
BI (2)	4.365	0.3770	0.544**	1	
BL (3)	3.845	0.6632	0.490**	0.491**	1

Note(s): **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3.
Correlation analysis

This is consistent with [Saeed et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Alif Fianto et al. \(2014\)](#), meaning that the image of Starbucks can be regarded as a key antecedent to customers' perceived loyalty to Starbucks.

Discussions, future works and conclusions

Discussions

EM is defined as a memorable experience that embeds deep into a customer's mind ([Ozturk, 2015](#)). Starbucks represents a significant case of a company that pursues EM and communicates with its consumers through its retail stores, aiming to create emotions and new experiences ([Ghafoorzadeh, 2013](#)). However, the empirical findings indicate that EM cannot influence customers' loyalty to Starbucks. This outcome is truly unexpected. Therefore, we have to find the truth in the black box. First, we will introduce the concept of "S-O-R" developed by [Belk \(1975\)](#) to the strategic experiential module by [Schmitt \(1999, 2000\)](#). To some degree, we can equate "Sense" and "Feel" to "S" (stimulus), "Think" to "O" (organism),

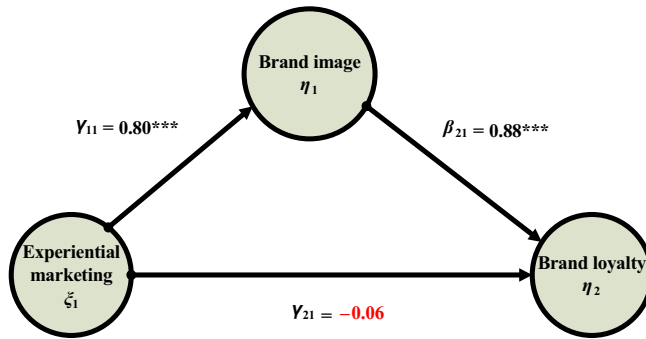


Figure 2.
Path analysis

Note(s): Chi-Square = 136.74, df = 41, *P*-value = 0.00000, RMSEA = 0.108

and “Act” and “Relate” to “R” (response). In other words, EM can be composed of three dimensions: “S”, “O” and “R”. From the “Analysis of the sample structure” section, “Act” and “Relate” are lower than the other three dimensions, meaning that the “R” of EM is not strong enough to encourage consumer post-purchase behaviours, even to be loyal to Starbucks. On the other hand, the structural analysis also reveals that 36% of our respondents are no more than 20 years old, and most of them are college students. Compared to adults or senior working people, these students may not be mature enough for internalization and socialization. That is, these students may go to Starbucks due to its external characteristics (e.g. atmosphere, decorations, layout, products or brand community), but they do not like to make any promises to go there repeatedly.

In addition, BI acts a complete mediator in the relationship between EM and BL. This means that if Starbucks expects to improve consumers’ loyalty to the brand, it only needs to rely on its good overall brand image. As a matter of fact, the yearly value of the coffee market in Taiwan reaches almost 100 billion dollars due to the numerous chain stores and small individual sole-proprietorship brands. Facing such business style homogeneity (e.g. product, promotion and store layout), people need some available information to help them to execute their following purchase decisions. Of course, BI is the best choice for us. Think about it. Though Starbucks can bring me to its locations, meaning that Starbucks has made its first move in comparison with other competitors, I can still decide to leave without any impressive image of this brand. Why? Accordingly, we can refer to BI as a powerful endorsement of a qualified relationship between EM and BL.

Limitations and future works

Just like any research, there are some limitations in this study. The limitations and further future works are described as follows.

The representativeness of the sampling— Due to timing and cost restrictions, we choose only two districts in New Taipei City (i.e. Banqiao and Tucheng) in the pre-test stage and four districts in Taipei City (i.e. Da-An, Zhong-Zheng, Nei-Hu and Xi-Yin) in the formal test stage. Though this included 62.4% (237/529) of the Starbucks located in Taipei City and New Taipei City and 53.1% (85/160) of the Starbucks located in the other four districts in the metropolitan area, the representativeness of the sample was still easily affected by sampling biases. Similarly, 36% of the total is under 20 (teenagers), and they cannot afford to buy expensive

drinks other than a milkshake or other carbonated drinks. However, our survey was conducted on weekdays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. in late July of 2019. The hot weather during the summer vacation may attract teenagers to Starbucks for a cool beverage (e.g. a Frappuccino or iced tea). A future study with a stratified sampling method on various branches of the same group and/or the real attributes of targeted customers to increase the representativeness of the sampling is expected.

The structure of the sample – Most of our respondents in this study are teenagers (36%). Moreover, many studies have examined the effects of age on consumer behaviour, such as hotels (e.g. Sahivaara, 2015), medical cosmetology (e.g. Chang *et al.*, 2020), sportswear (e.g. Rahulan *et al.*, 2015), airlines (e.g. Ganiyu, 2017) and luxury products (e.g. Yazıncı, 2016). Therefore, future work focusing on the effect of age on consumer behaviour in the context of coffee brands is required.

Integrity – Due to being restricted by the research timing, sampling costs and resource convenience, we focused on the relationships among EM, BI and BL. However, there are still many antecedents of BL or consequences of post-purchase intention/behaviour that have not been addressed. Examples include satisfaction (e.g. Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Raza *et al.*, 2012; Ganiyu, 2017) and trust (e.g. Grewal *et al.*, 2004; Mosavi and Ghaedi, 2012). Therefore, adding other variables to the existing model for further analysis is expected.

The sample size – The 200 participants here do not seem to offer generalizable results, thereby influencing the quality of the findings. Therefore, a larger sample in future works is expected. For example, when using the *Sample Size Calculator* to calculate the sample size needed (<https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>), given that the population of the metropolitan area (Taipei City) is 2.63 million, the necessary sample size would be 1,037 with a 95% confidence level and 3 confidence intervals. However, the four sampling districts account for 53.1% of the total; therefore, the reasonable sample size would be 550 (1,037*53.1%).

Social media – Due to the explosion in the popularity of the Internet recently, the ways that people exchange information or communicate with others have experienced significant changes (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). Among these changes, social media are the emerging mass media mostly used by companies to disseminate information to consumers. Most importantly, EM is all about creating experiences while social media is about sharing them (Major, 2018). In the last 3 years, there have been several studies that focus on analysing the Facebook fan pages of Taiwan's Starbucks (e.g. Chang *et al.*, 2019a, b; Chung *et al.*, 2018; 2017), including their engagement/interactivity, friendship, trust, WOM and repurchase intentions. Therefore, future works introducing the effects of social media on the EM–BL relationship are expected.

Others – Whether it is a rational or emotional perception, BI must be understood and interpreted by consumers (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990) to create the effect of customer loyalty. Last, the effect of BI is worth exploring in more detail, and studies on trust (e.g. Alhaddad, 2015), interactivity/engagement (e.g. Greve, 2014) and relationship quality (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2017) are needed.

Conclusions

In the era of the experiential economy, Starbucks has achieved great EM success and has become a spokesman of EM as well. This study aimed to explore the relationships among EM, BI and BL in Starbucks. By using SEM with 200 valid samples from four districts in the Taipei metropolitan area, the empirical findings show that two of three research hypotheses are supported, where H1 is not. That is, EM and BI both significantly influence BL, whereas EM is not expected to impact BL. This finding means that EM is no longer the exclusive factor for BL. For Starbucks, it must strengthen consumer perceptions of its BI to create customer loyalty.

Note

1. The value of Cronbach' α within 0.6–0.7 is belonging to medium level of reliability.

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