

Formation of customer-based brand equity via authenticity

The mediating role of satisfaction and the moderating role of restaurant type

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the extent to which customers' perceptions of restaurant authenticity facilitate the establishment's customer-based brand equity (CBBE) – both directly and indirectly – via customer satisfaction. The study also analyzes whether restaurant type moderates the antecedent relationships of CBBE formation.

Design/methodology/approach – Two restaurants of different types were selected for the study: a mid-scale and a moderate/casual restaurant. Based on a final total sample of 402 customers of both restaurant types, a moderated mediation regression model was used.

Findings – It was found that the level of authenticity perceived by the restaurant visitor during the gastronomic experience is an antecedent of restaurant brand equity formation, both directly and indirectly, via customer satisfaction. Furthermore, these antecedent relationships were found to be partially moderated by restaurant type.

Research limitations/implications – Only two restaurants were used for the study. This study could be replicated by comparing other types of restaurants with differentiated characteristics to test whether the results obtained for these two types can be extrapolated to the rest.

Originality/value – There is no empirical evidence in the literature regarding the possible moderating effect of restaurant type on brand equity formation, so the particular note is the simultaneous application of CBBE measurement to the analysis of two different types of restaurant and the differences in their brand equity formation. On the other hand, there are few studies that use moderated mediation regression analysis as a methodological technique in the field of restaurants, so this is an interesting methodological contribution.

Keywords Brand equity, Restaurants, Authenticity, Moderated mediation, Customer satisfaction

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

As restaurants play a critical role in culinary tourism (Rolim *et al.*, 2019), the academic literature has paid significant attention to the study of tourist behavior in restaurants, examining variables such as recommendation and revisit intention (Cheng and Peng, 2018) and the degree of customer satisfaction (Namkung and Jang, 2008).

The question of how customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is formed and managed is especially topical in the academic research dealing with marketing, in general (Han *et al.*, 2015), and with tourism, in particular (Tasci, 2018). Yet, in the restaurant field, there are many questions to be answered regarding how the CBBE of a restaurant is formed, following diners' gastronomic experience.



Of all the various antecedents of CBBE examined by the academic literature (Sijoria *et al.*, 2019), the present study focuses on customer-perceived restaurant authenticity and customer satisfaction. The choice of these particular antecedents is justified, first, because of the systematic study of customer satisfaction in service context and specifically restaurants (Shahzadi *et al.*, 2018), second, because of the current scholarly interest in the concept of authenticity, both in the tourism sphere (Lee and Phau, 2018) and in the restaurant context (Liu *et al.*, 2018) and third, because the more culturally authentic the restaurant, the easier it is for customers to recognize it as such (Shahzadi *et al.*, 2018).

This study also examines the moderating effect of different restaurant types on the process of restaurant CBBE formation, analyzing two types of establishment: mid-scale vs moderate/casual restaurants. The rationale for selecting these two types is that they have not been studied in the literature to date (Canziani *et al.*, 2016), unlike other typologies such as luxury or fast-food establishments, which have been widely studied (Cheng and Peng, 2018). The moderating role of restaurant type has, until now, been taken into account to analyze customers' hedonic and utilitarian assessments of the restaurant (Hlee *et al.*, 2018) and the likelihood of their revisiting (Ali *et al.*, 2019), among other aspects of customer response (Hwang and Ok, 2013).

Therefore, the main aim of this study is to analyze the process of restaurant brand equity formation, from the customer perspective. More specifically, the work analyzes the degree to which the level of restaurant perceived authenticity facilitates (directly, and indirectly via customer satisfaction) restaurant CBBE formation. This analysis also takes into account the possible moderating effect of restaurant type (mid-scale vs moderate/casual) on this process. The conclusions point to interesting recommendations for restaurant management, to enable the establishments to increase their value to customers.

2. Literature review

2.1 Restaurant brand equity

Conceptually, brand equity can be defined as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, which add to (or subtract from) the value that a product or service provides to customers and aims to identify and differentiate goods and services from those of competitors (Aaker, 1991). Following Aaker, Keller (1993) added the consumer perspective to this previous concept (consumer-based brand equity, or CBBE). Keller's approach considers the differential effect caused by consumers' brand awareness in response to marketing activities, including brand beliefs and attitudes, which give rise to benefits for the brand (Keller, 1993). Yoo and Donthu (2001) contend that the brand equity concept has more facets, pointing out that it includes the consumer's choice between branded and non-branded products that share the same characteristics. According to Yoo and Donthu (2001), the conceptual definition of the term should include aspects such as attitudinal disposition, loyalty, image, the value inherent in the name, quality and behavioral intention, among many other dimensions.

Many of the studies that have attempted to measure CBBE have used the initial dimensions proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993): brand quality, brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand image (Zavattaro *et al.*, 2015). Brand awareness refers to the strength of the brand's presence in the minds of the target audience over time (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality is based on the general perception of the quality or superiority of a product or service, compared to the alternatives, and with regard to its intended use (Keller, 2003). Brand image is the most widely studied dimension and is defined as the consumer's rational or emotional perception of specific brands. Finally, loyalty is defined as the bond that is formed between the customer and the brand (Aaker, 1991).

Later studies added a fifth dimension to the previous classical dimensions: perceived brand value (Pike and Bianchi, 2013). This refers to the benefit the customer believes they derive, relative to the costs associated with consuming the brand in question.

In short, the literature proposes two alternative theoretical frameworks for the measurement of CBBE:

- (1) on the basis that the construct reflects the different component dimensions (reflective construct) (Kladou and Kehagias, 2014); and
- (2) on the basis that brand equity is a one-dimensional construct that can be measured overall (Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

This latter approach has been used by several other authors (Frias-Jamilena *et al.*, 2017). Frias-Jamilena *et al.* (2017) found that the overall measurement of brand equity was equivalent, in terms of validity, to brand equity measurement in reflective terms (that is, via its component dimensions).

Meanwhile, the CBBE model has been widely used in the academic literature in recent decades, in the field of marketing, in general (Zavattaro *et al.*, 2015), and tourism (Tasci, 2018) and restaurants (Kim and Kim, 2004), in particular.

In the restaurant context, it refers to the power of a brand to influence what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about it (Kim and Kim, 2004).

In this sphere of study, CBBE measurement has received less scholarly attention (Kim and Kim, 2004; Majid and Chik, 2014; Nam *et al.*, 2011), as the majority of studies have focused on very specific establishment types such as restaurant chains (Hyun and Kim, 2011), ethnic restaurants (Lu *et al.*, 2015) or fast-food establishments (Tan *et al.*, 2015). By contrast, the present research addresses the CBBE formation process of full-service restaurants. This refers to food-service establishments where customers are waited on and where the bill is settled only after the meal is finished [North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), 2017]. The analysis will specifically focus on two restaurant types and draw conclusions about equity formation in each type.

2.2 Restaurant authenticity

Authenticity is a broad, socially constructed concept (Cohen and Cohen, 2012) concerned with the interpretations of facts (Beverland *et al.*, 2008) born out of individual preferences (Ebster and Guist, 2005). Recent years have witnessed an increase in scientific interest in the concept of authenticity and its effects on the behavior of individuals (Kovács *et al.*, 2017). The stronger the perceived authenticity of a brand, the more consumers are likely to defend it, and the higher the level of equity it will generate, compared to rival brands (Beverland, 2009).

There are theoretical notions that link tourism, gastronomy, culture and authenticity (Özdemir and Seyitoglu, 2017). For example, authenticity has been studied in relation to the authentic experience of the tourist (Kim *et al.*, 2009), which includes food preparation methods typical of the region and food that is prepared by local individuals.

Restaurant authenticity refers to the degree to which the customer perceives the restaurant's food and overall environment to be congruent with the culture in question (Jang *et al.*, 2012; Liu and Jang, 2009). In other words, a restaurant is deemed authentic when the food and the whole culinary experience reflect the relevant culture (Wang and Mattila, 2015). With regard to the authenticity of the cuisine, this is concerned with whether the ingredients and dishes are exclusive to a particular geographical area, and whether they are cooked in the traditional manner with local ingredients, prepared by people native to that area, and so on (Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014). The authenticity of the restaurant environment refers to

matters of interior and exterior design, decoration, music and staff attire (Jang *et al.*, 2012; Wang and Mattila, 2015).

2.3 Authenticity as antecedent of restaurant customer-based brand equity

According to Lu *et al.* (2015), the influence of authenticity on CBBE is a mechanism that can be explained by the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). In this model, external environmental stimuli produce emotional responses, which lead, in turn, to behavior. From this perspective, the authenticity of a brand acts as a major stimulus capable of triggering a response in terms of brand equity.

On this point, some authors find a positive relationship between the authenticity of a brand and some of the components of CBBE. Gilmore and Pine (2007) find the perception of authenticity to be an important antecedent of brand loyalty. In the tourism context, Lee *et al.* (2016) and Lee and Phau (2018) conclude that authenticity is a major indicator of destination quality and that it affects destination perceived value. Specifically in the field of cultural tourism, Shen *et al.* (2014) find that the authenticity of a culturally important location (such as a heritage site) positively affects tourist loyalty. The relationship between authenticity and CBBE has also been examined by Liu *et al.* (2015), in the context of counterfeit products.

Returning to the restaurant sphere, Lu *et al.* (2015) studied ethnic restaurants, finding that the perceived authenticity of the restaurant positively affected some of the component dimensions of CBBE – specifically, the degree of customer brand awareness, the brand image and perceived brand quality. More recently, Liu *et al.* (2018) confirmed the relationship between authenticity and perceived value in restaurants (another dimension of brand equity). On this premise, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1.* A greater degree of restaurant perceived authenticity brings a greater degree of restaurant CBBE.

2.4 The mediating role of customer satisfaction between authenticity and customer-based brand equity

According to SOR theory (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), when exposed to environmental stimuli, the individual interprets them by developing a reaction and then a behavior. Some researchers have applied this theory in the restaurant context, examining the effect of the dining area, the service quality and the food on the customer, via their emotions and cognitive responses (Jang *et al.*, 2012). More recently, authenticity has also started to be studied as a stimulus in the restaurant context, which generates behaviors via a response (Liu *et al.*, 2018). Here, the present study provides an original perspective that has not been studied in the literature to date, by examining the mediating role of satisfaction in the antecedent relationship between consumer perceived authenticity and CBBE. The literature indicates that customer satisfaction is a psychological concept referring to the feeling of wellbeing and pleasure derived by the consumer from the difference between their expectations of a product or service and the actual outcomes of it (Pizam *et al.*, 2016). Studies also show that authenticity is associated positively with customer satisfaction in areas such as job performance (Van den Bosch and Taris, 2014). Several studies have also found that authenticity has a significant impact on satisfaction with a destination (Lee and Phau, 2018),

specifically in the context of restaurants (Muskat *et al.*, 2019). Based on the above findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H2. A greater degree of restaurant perceived authenticity brings a greater degree of customer satisfaction with the restaurant.

Regarding the customer's satisfaction with a brand, this has been found to be a key antecedent of CBBE in areas such as environment-friendly products (Chen, 2010), banking services (Rambocas *et al.*, 2014) and hotels and restaurants (Nam *et al.*, 2011). In the case of the latter study, the authors concluded that customer satisfaction exerts an effect on one particular dimension of CBBE, namely loyalty. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

- H3. A greater degree of customer satisfaction with the restaurant brings a greater degree of restaurant CBBE.

2.5 Restaurant type and its moderating role in customer-based brand equity formation

Authors have taken several different approaches to restaurant classification (Muller and Woods, 1994). However, the classifications considered the most important are those of the US National Restaurant Association (NRA) and the North American Industry Classification (NAICS) system. According to Canziani *et al.* (2016), the NRA classification is the most widely referenced by the academic literature, and it comprises five types of full-service restaurant: (1) quick-service; (2) fast-casual; (3) mid-scale; (4) moderate/casual; and (5) upscale/fine dining. Another widely cited work is that of Muller and Woods (1994), who also reference the National Restaurant Association (2010) classification system.

Both works agree over most of the established categories (Table I). The present research focuses on mid-scale and moderate/casual restaurants, as these two categories receive little attention in the extant scientific literature (Canziani *et al.*, 2016), unlike fast-food restaurants.

There is no empirical evidence in the literature regarding the possible moderating effect of restaurant type on CBBE formation. However, there are studies that examine the moderating role of restaurant type in the analysis of differences: in customer responses to restaurants (Ali *et al.*, 2019); in the ratings they provide on restaurants in search service platforms (Hlee *et al.*, 2019); and in various aspects from the restaurant management perspective (Jung *et al.*, 2018).

Among those studies analyzing the moderating role of restaurant type on customer responses, the works of Jang *et al.* (2012) and Yan *et al.* (2015) stand out in particular. The former examines casual restaurants vs upscale restaurants, and the latter deals with downscale, casual-dining and upscale establishments.

Jang *et al.* (2012) analyze the moderating effect of restaurant type on the formation of customer intention. They conclude that authenticity of the restaurant environment affects the customer's emotions in the case of fine-dining establishments, while it is the authenticity of both cuisine and environment that exert this effect in the case of casual restaurants. Elsewhere, Yan *et al.* (2015) find that the effects of environment quality on satisfaction are greater in the case of upscale restaurants than in downscale or casual-dining establishments. Consequently, restaurant type is likely to moderate the relationship between the influencing factors and customer responses (Kim and Moon, 2009; Jang *et al.*, 2012).

Despite these more general findings, there is no empirical evidence showing that the specific relationship between restaurant authenticity and customer satisfaction is moderated

Table I.
Classification of
restaurants and their
characteristics

Restaurant type	National Restaurant Association (2010)	Muller and Woods (1994)	Main characteristics
Quick service restaurants/fast food	✓	✓	Brand positioning, low prices, time savings, centralized in a single offer, self-service, effective advertising, standardization
Fast casual	✓		Similar to fast-food, there is no table service, but it offers higher quality in both food and atmosphere. Falls between the fast-service and the full-service restaurant
Mid-scale	✓	✓	Brand loyalty, varied menu, perceived value (price vs portion sizes), comfort, large portions, high costs and margins, size of premises
Moderate/casual	✓	✓	Brand identity, fashionable touches, environment, key customer groups, on-trend produce, changes according to the season, limited inventory, moderate personalization, high concept, theatrical touch
Upscale/fine dining	✓	✓	Personal identification with the customer, style, service, gastronomic experience, high product quality, menu complexity, gourmet tasting menus, high level of presentation and personalization, product differentiation, image, price as mechanism of identity

Source: The authors, based on the work of National Restaurant Association (2010) and Muller and Woods (1994)

by restaurant type. Notably, the studies examining the influence of authenticity on customer response have always been conducted in the context of ethnic restaurants (Liu *et al.*, 2018; Muskat *et al.*, 2019).

However, the literature claims that authenticity is an attribute that generates favorable responses from customers (satisfaction) (Muskat *et al.*, 2019), that the impact of authenticity in terms of stimulus–response is greater in the case of restaurants that attract higher customer expectations (moderate/casual establishments) (Park and Almanza, 2015), and that customers who visit higher scale restaurants do so not only to eat (utilitarian motivation) but also to enjoy the facilities and the overall experience (hedonic motivation) (Walker and Lundberg, 2005). Drawing on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. The effect of authenticity on customer satisfaction will be greater among customers of moderate/casual restaurants than among those of mid-scale restaurants.

With regard to the moderating effect of restaurant type on the relationship between authenticity and CBBE, Jang *et al.* (2012) found different effects, depending on restaurant type. More specifically, they identified that restaurant environment authenticity exerts a positive effect on perceived value (which is a component of CBBE) in the case of fine restaurants. They also found that the authenticity of the cuisine exerts a significant effect on perceived value in the case of casual restaurants. Given that, in the present study, authenticity is taken as an overall measure, and that there is a greater likelihood of developing a brand preference in environments that emphasize hedonism as opposed to utilitarianism (Hwang and Ok, 2013), and accepting that customer expectations will be

greater in the case of higher category restaurants (Walker and Lundberg, 2005), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. The effect of authenticity on CBBE will be greater among customers of moderate/casual restaurants than among those of mid-scale restaurants.

Furthermore, the fact that customer satisfaction exerts an effect on CBBE has been demonstrated in the case of electronic products (Chen, 2010) and in banking services (Iglesias *et al.*, 2019). In the restaurant context, Nam *et al.* (2011) tested the effect of customer satisfaction on brand loyalty (a component of CBBE). On this basis, and, again, on the premise that customers of upscale restaurants have higher expectations than customers of lower-category establishments (Walker and Lundberg, 2005), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6. The effect of customer satisfaction on CBBE will be greater among customers of moderate/casual restaurants than among customers of mid-scale restaurants.

Figure 1 shows graphically the theoretical model of CBBE formation in the restaurants analyzed in this research, according to the proposed hypotheses.

3. Method

3.1 Data collection

Two restaurants of different types were selected for the study:

- (1) a mid-scale restaurant characterized by offering a varied menu, good value for money, large portions and large capacity; and
- (2) a moderate/casual restaurant listed in the prestigious *Michelin Guide*, characterized by unwavering attention to on-trend products, high concept, décor and creativity.

Both establishments use locally sourced produce and prepare their dishes with great care.

These two types, which have received scant attention from the scholarship dealing with restaurants, present specific characteristics that are clearly distinguishable. That said, the

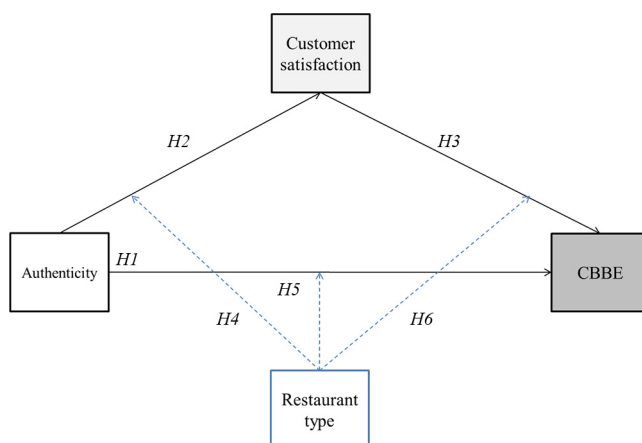


Figure 1.
Conceptual model of
brand equity
formation for a
restaurant

two categories are closer to one another than to, for example, fast-food or fast-casual restaurants.

A letter of invitation was sent to the managers of both restaurants, asking them to participate in the study. The letter explained the research objectives and asked permission for the restaurant staff to distribute the questionnaire to the diners at the end of their gastronomic experience.

The research population comprised customers of mid-scale and moderate/casual Spanish restaurants. Sample selection was conducted by means of this self-administered structured questionnaire distributed in the main dining area just after the customers had finished their meal.

The questionnaire was implemented via the *Qualtrics* platform, and customers responded via a Tablet. The questionnaire was designed and administered in Spanish, so as to avoid possible response bias deriving from the chosen language. One of the conditions of participation was therefore that the respondent should be a native Spanish speaker.

The data collection procedure was carried out from June to October, 2018. Of a total of 476 completed questionnaires, 74 had to be eliminated, as they contained incomplete answers, resulting in a final sample of 402. Of these, 219 were customers of the mid-scale restaurant and 184 of the moderate/casual restaurant.

Table II presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and shows how they compare with the data provided by Spain's Association of Communications Media Research (AIMC, 2017) regarding customers who visit restaurants regularly. It can be observed that there are no major differences between the sample and the population defined by the AIMC, which points to a good level of sample representativeness.

3.2 Measures

A seven-point, three-item Likert scale adapted from the work of Lu et al. (2015) was used to measure perceived authenticity, based on the subject's gastronomic experience. Overall customer satisfaction with the restaurant was also measured on a 7-point 3-item Likert scale, adapted from the work of Ryu and Han (2011). Finally, to measure CBBE, we adopted an overall measure of brand equity, using a seven-point, four-item Likert scale adapted from previous studies to the restaurant context (Frias-Jamilena et al., 2017) (Table III).

3.3 Evaluation of non-response and common method biases

The measures applied in the study were covered by one single questionnaire. It was therefore necessary to test for the problem of common method variance, using procedural and statistical techniques. Following the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003), the survey began with a brief introduction explaining the main variables. The survey indicated

Table II.
Comparison of
population and
sample

	AIMC* (2017)	Sample
Gender	Male (50.57%) Female (49.43%)	Male (52.24%) Female (47.76%)
Age	35-44 (22.70%) 45-54 (18.69%) 25-34 (18.67%)	36-45 (29.35%) 46-55 (24.38%) 25-35 (22.14%)
Income level	€1,321-1,845 per month (23.99%)	€1,201-1,800 per month (21.84%)
Note: *Individuals who frequently visit restaurants		

						Formation of customer- based brand equity
Construct (adapted from)	Items	<i>B</i> (<i>t</i> -value)	<i>R</i> ²	CR	AVE	
Authenticity (Lu <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	(AUT2) The food at this restaurant is authentic	0.84(15.10)	0.70	0.86	0.76	823
	(AUT3) I enjoy the authentic dining experience and service provided by employees in this restaurant	0.91(13.90)	0.82			
Satisfaction (Ryu and Han, 2011)	(SAT1) Overall, I am satisfied with this restaurant	0.83(12.74)	0.69	0.89	0.72	
	(SAT2) The overall feeling I got from this restaurant put me in a good mood	0.89(17.15)	0.79			
	(SAT3) I really enjoyed myself at this restaurant	0.83(12.88)	0.69			
Brand equity (Im <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Frias- Jamilena <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	(BEQ1) It makes sense to choose this restaurant rather than another one, even if they are alike	0.91(12.64)	0.69	0.93	0.71	
	(BEQ2) Even if there is another restaurant with the same characteristics, I prefer this one	0.86(16.74)	0.82			
	(BEQ3) If there is another restaurant as good as this one, I still prefer this one	0.86(16.61)	0.74			
	(BEQ4) If there is another restaurant, no different to this one, it seems more intelligent to choose the restaurant I'm in now	0.91(17.59)	0.82			

Table III.
Confirmatory factor
analysis results

that all responses were anonymous and confidential. Finally, we emphasized that respondents should answer the questionnaire honestly.

According to Richardson *et al.* (2009) and Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), the unmeasured latent method factor was applied. This factor confirmed that there was no response bias present, as the model in which the bias factor was included (SB chi-square: 52.29) did not significantly improve the result of the CFA, compared to the model in which this factor was not included (SB chi-square 58.07). Having applied the SB scaled difference test, it was concluded that no bias existed (p -value > 0.05) (Richardson *et al.*, 2009).

4. Data analysis

4.1 Psychometric properties of the scales

Prior to the hypothesis test, it was necessary to analyze the psychometric properties of the scales for perceived authenticity, customer satisfaction and CBBE. For this purpose, a CFA was performed with LISREL software. The overall goodness-of-fit indicators presented values within the recommended limits (SB chi-square: 58.07; p -value: 0.00; RMSEA: 0.059; CFI: 0.99). All loadings were significant ($p < 0.01$), with individual reliability (R^2) above the threshold recommended by the literature (0.50) (Del Barrio and Luque, 2012), except for item AUT1, which was ultimately removed as it presented a value of individual reliability (R^2) below the recommended limit (0.44). Average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were found to be above the recommended thresholds of 0.80 and 0.50, respectively.

The results shown in Table IV confirm the existence of discriminant validity, as the correlation between the latent constructs does not exceed the values of the square root of the AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These results were also confirmed by calculating the

heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio proposed by [Henseler et al. \(2015\)](#), which showed that all the values were below the threshold of 0.85 recommended by [Voorhees et al. \(2016\)](#).

Having verified that the scales presented good psychometric properties, we tested the proposed hypotheses by means of mediated moderation and conditional analysis using PROCESS software ([Hayes, 2018](#)). This tool requires the variables in question to be observed ([Hayes and Rockwood, 2017](#)). It was therefore necessary to create an observed variable for each latent construct, using the average of the scale items.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

Performing mediated moderation and conditional analysis is well suited to testing hypothesis about the effect of a variable X (in this case, authenticity) on a variable Y (brand equity), mediated by a variable M (satisfaction) and moderated by a variable W (restaurant type) ([Hayes, 2018](#)). The indirect effect of X on Y through mediator M quantifies the estimated difference in Y resulting from a one-unit change in X (authenticity) through a sequence of causal steps in which X affects M, which in turn affects Y. Also, X's effect on Y is said to be moderated by W if the size or sign of X's effect on Y varies according to W. Moderation is also popularly known as interaction. If X's effect on Y is moderated by W, then X and W interact ([Hayes and Rockwood, 2017](#)). PROCESS software brings together these considerations into one simple procedure, and enables categorical variables (in our case, W) to be used with continuous variables (X, M, Y).

Therefore, to test the proposed hypotheses a moderated mediation regression model was implemented via OLS regression and bootstrap estimation (10,000) ([Hayes, 2018](#)).

The independent variable was restaurant perceived authenticity, the dependent variable was restaurant CBBE, and the mediating variable was customer satisfaction with the restaurant. The moderating variable used was restaurant type, a dichotomous variable that took the value 1 for the mid-scale restaurant and 2 for the moderate/casual restaurant. The results show the existence of a direct, positive and significant effect of perceived authenticity (X) on CBBE (Y) ($\beta_{\text{Authenticity} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: 0.27; $p < 0.05$). From this, it is concluded that, the greater the customer's perception of restaurant authenticity, the greater the restaurant's CBBE, in line with *H1* ([Table V](#)).

The results also confirm *H2*: the more authentic the customer perceives the restaurant to be, the greater their customer satisfaction ($\beta_{\text{Authenticity} \rightarrow \text{CustomerSatisfaction}}$: 0.60; $p < 0.05$) ([Table V](#)). The findings also confirm *H3*: the greater the customer's satisfaction with the restaurant, the greater its CBBE ($\beta_{\text{CustomerSatisfaction} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: 0.55; $p < 0.05$) ([Table V](#)). In light of these two results, it can be concluded that overall customer satisfaction with the restaurant acts as a partial mediator between restaurant authenticity and CBBE.

With regard to the moderating role of restaurant type in the antecedent relationships of CBBE, the results indicate that restaurant type exerts a direct and significant effect on the outcome variables CBBE ($\beta_{\text{RestaurantType} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: -0.58; $p < 0.05$) ([Table V](#)) and customer

Variables	Authenticity	Customer satisfaction	CBBE
Authenticity	0.87	0.79	0.65
Customer satisfaction	0.80	0.84	0.73
CBBE	0.65	0.72	0.86

Table IV.
Discriminant validity

Notes: AVE on the diagonal (bold); squared correlations under the diagonal; HTMT above the diagonal (in italics)

<i>Moderated mediation analysis. Outcome variable: CBBE (Y)</i>					
Effect	Coef.	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Constant	6.09**	0.03	177.54	0.00	6.03-6.16
Authenticity (X)	0.27**	0.06	4.21	0.00	0.14-0.40
Satisfaction (M1)	0.55**	0.07	7.63	0.00	0.41-0.70
Restaurant type (W)	-0.58**	0.06	-8.46	0.00	-0.71-0.44
X*W	0.01	0.12	0.14	0.88	-0.23-0.26
M1*W	0.24 *	0.14	1.71	0.08	-0.03-0.52
Model summary: R^2 : 0.74; F: 98.41; df1: 5; df2: 397; p-value: 0.00					

<i>Moderated mediation analysis. Outcome variable: Satisfaction</i>					
Effect	Coef.	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Constant	0.01	0.02	0.62	0.53	-0.03-0.06
Authenticity (X)	0.60 **	0.03	16.10	0.00	0.52-0.67
Restaurant type (W)	-0.16 **	0.05	-3.26	0.00	-0.26-0.11
X*W	0.20 **	0.07	2.75	0.00	0.05-0.34

Model summary: R^2 : 0.71; F: 137.69; df1: 3; df2: 399; p-value: 0.00

Direct and indirect effects of authenticity on CBBE

Conditional direct effects

Restaurant type	Effect	SE	95% CI
Mid-scale	0.26 **	0.09	0.07-0.45
Moderate/casual	0.28 **	0.08	0.12-0.44

Conditional indirect effects

Authenticity → Satisfaction → CBBE

Type of restaurant	Effect	SE	95% CI
Mid-scale	0.22 **	0.05	0.12-0.39
Moderate/casual	0.49 **	0.08	0.33-0.66

Notes: **Coefficient significant (5%); *coefficient significant (10%); 95% confidence interval does not contain "0"

Table V.
Results of moderated
mediation analysis

satisfaction ($\beta_{\text{RestaurantType} \rightarrow \text{CustomerSatisfaction}}$: -0.16; $p < 0.05$). In both cases, given the negative coefficient, it can be concluded that both CBBE and customer satisfaction have higher values in the case of the mid-scale restaurant than in the case of the moderate/casual restaurant. By contrast, analysis of the interaction effects of restaurant type with the other relationships established in the model shows significant effects for the relationship between authenticity and customer satisfaction ($\beta_{\text{Authenticity} \times \text{RestaurantType} \rightarrow \text{CustomerSatisfaction}}$: 0.20; $p < 0.05$) (Table V), and quasi-significant effects for the relationship between customer satisfaction and CBBE ($\beta_{\text{CustomerSatisfaction} \times \text{RestaurantType} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: 0.24; $p < 0.10$) (Table V).

This means that, when restaurants offer highly authentic food and service that are congruent with their category, there are no differences between the types of restaurant in terms of customer satisfaction, with both achieving a high level of customer satisfaction. However, when the customer perceives authenticity to be low, customer satisfaction suffers in both cases, although significantly more so in the case of moderate/casual restaurants than in the mid-scale establishment (Figure 2). Thus, $H4$ can be confirmed.

The greater the customer satisfaction (in the case of both mid-scale and moderate restaurants), the greater the restaurant CBBE; but, as customer satisfaction decreases, the slope pertaining to the moderate/casual restaurant is the steeper of the two, and therefore its brand capital is hardest-hit (Figure 3). This moderation by restaurant type confirms

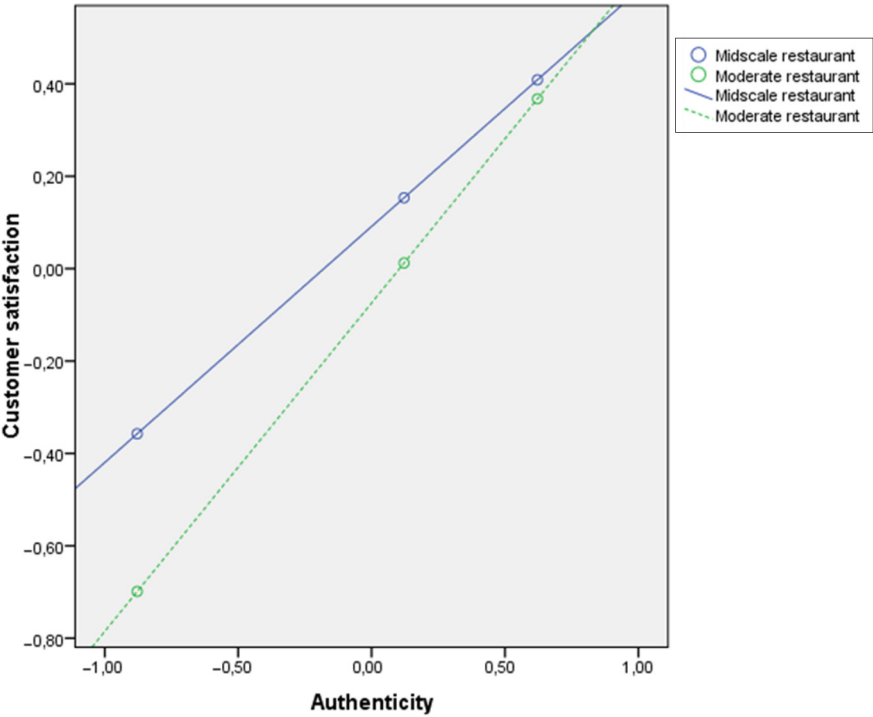


Figure 2.
Interaction effect of
authenticity on
customer satisfaction,
by restaurant type

hypothesis *H6*. The only interaction that does not present significant moderation values is the effect of authenticity on CBBE. *H5* therefore cannot be confirmed.

Using PROCESS software, the direct and indirect conditional effects of the “authenticity” on the “CBBE” were calculated, taking into account the moderator (restaurant type) (Table V). The results show that this direct effect is significant and positive, in line with *H1*, for both types of restaurant ($\beta_{\text{Mid-scale}}$: 0.26; CI: 0.07-0.45; $p < 0.05$); (β_{Moderate} : 0.28; CI: 0.12-0.44; $p < 0.05$). The indirect conditional effect of authenticity on CBBE via the mediating variable “customer satisfaction” is also significant for both restaurant types ($\beta_{\text{Mid-scale_Authenticity} \rightarrow \text{CustomerSatisfaction} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: 0.22; CI: 0.12-0.39); ($\beta_{\text{Moderate_Authenticity} \rightarrow \text{CustomerSatisfaction} \rightarrow \text{CBBE}}$: 0.49; CI: 0.33-0.66), this effect being significantly greater in the case of moderate/casual restaurants.

5. Conclusions

The present study examines for the first time the effect of restaurant perceived authenticity on the formation of restaurant CBBE. Previous studies focused solely on the case of ethnic restaurants and on the effect of authenticity on only one dimension of CBBE.

Our findings lead us to conclude that restaurant customers present a favorable response to the restaurant if, and only if, they perceive significant levels of authenticity in both the food and the environment. That is, the more congruent customers perceive the restaurant’s food and environment to be with the culture in question, the greater the value this will generate for them, which will translate into loyalty and preference for that establishment.

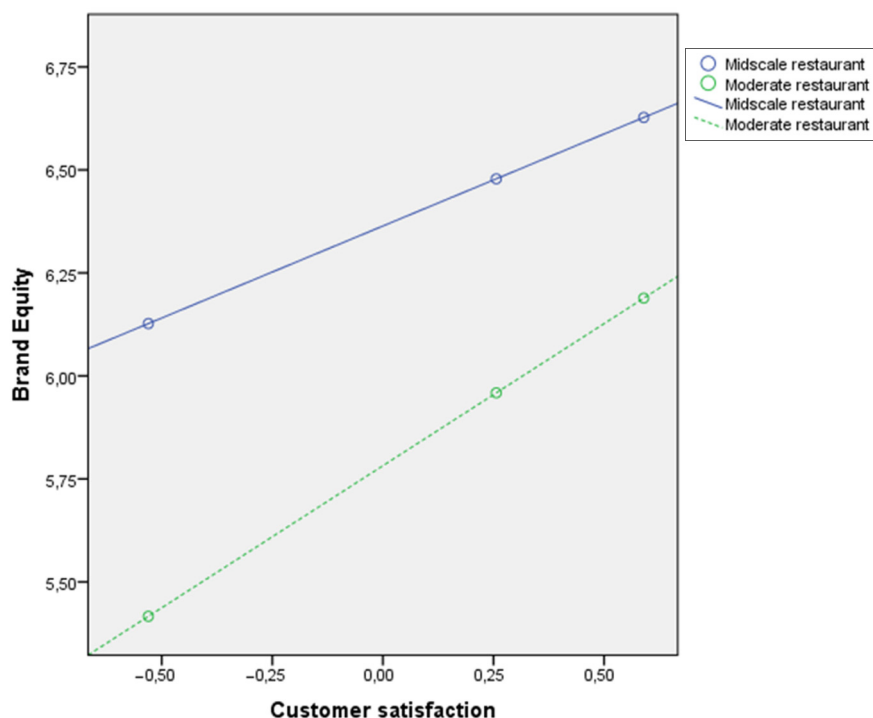


Figure 3.
Interaction effect of
customer satisfaction
on CBBE depending
on restaurant type

This effect was observed to occur not only directly, but also indirectly, mediated to a large extent by the tourist's satisfaction with the overall restaurant experience.

It could not be confirmed that the direct effect of authenticity on CBBE is moderated by restaurant type. Interestingly, however, when the effect of authenticity on CBBE is mediated by satisfaction, we observed a greater effect in the case of the moderate/casual restaurant than in the mid-scale restaurant. In other words, customers of the moderate/casual restaurant are increasingly satisfied, the greater they perceive the authenticity of the restaurant to be; and this, in turn, generate benefits in terms of CBBE.

Similarly, the study finds that, when customers perceive the food and the atmosphere of the restaurant to be authentic, their satisfaction is high in both restaurant types. However, when the perceived authenticity is low, customer satisfaction suffers to a greater extent in the case of moderate/casual restaurants. Meanwhile, the more satisfied the customer, the more CBBE is generated (for both restaurant types). However, should satisfaction drop, the greatest loss in CBBE terms is found in the case of the moderate/casual restaurant.

The present results have also revealed a peculiar feature: both CBBE and customer satisfaction have more weight in mid-scale restaurants, when these variables are observed by themselves, without being the effect of another variable. This means that the value of these variables is higher for customers of the mid-scale restaurant, while the effects of the relationships between variables is generally greater in the case of the moderate/casual restaurant. In practice, this means that customers of mid-scale restaurants give higher scores for satisfaction and CBBE than customers of moderate/casual restaurants. However, when CBBE is the effect of customer satisfaction, and the latter is the effect of authenticity,

in both cases the weight is greater for the moderate/casual restaurant. That is, customers of mid-scale restaurants value this type especially, choosing it above other types, which may be related to aspects such as familiarity with the restaurant (Ha and Jang, 2010). Similarly, customers of this restaurant type give higher scores for satisfaction.

The findings of the study confirm the importance of the degree of restaurant authenticity, as perceived by its customers, in the formation of restaurant CBBE. The results also confirm the mediating role of customer satisfaction.

These results are of interest to academic researchers, particularly as, to date, no other study has – to the authors' knowledge – examined the moderating role of restaurant type in restaurant CBBE formation.

6. Implications and limitations

6.1 Methodological implications

In light of SOR theory (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), which holds that, when exposed to environmental stimuli, the individual interprets these by developing a reaction and then a behavior, this study proposes, for the first time, a CBBE formation model based on perceived restaurant authenticity and customer satisfaction with the overall restaurant experience, moderated by restaurant type.

There are a number of studies that focus on analyzing restaurants from the customer perspective that use structural equation modeling (Ali *et al.*, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2018) and basic linear regression models (Shahzadi *et al.*, 2018). However, there are few studies that use moderated mediation regression analysis (Hayes, 2018) as a methodological technique in the field of restaurants. This makes an interesting methodological contribution, as it enables the direct and indirect conditional effects of the “authenticity” on the “CBBE” to be analyzed, taking into account the mediating variable “customer satisfaction” and the moderator “restaurant type”.

A further interesting contribution of the present work is its methodological rigor in establishing the criteria for selecting the types of restaurant, including reference to the *Michelin Guide*. It is based on a clear classification of restaurant typology and selects two types under-researched to date, describing their differentiated characteristics. We believe this methodological clarity helps in better understanding the findings.

6.2 Practical implications

The regions of the world that are characterized by offering high-end food and wine constitute primary tourist areas offering numerous restaurants. The high-end restaurants therefore receive considerable attention from tourists – particularly the culinary tourist.

This also helps explain, the major influence of authenticity on restaurant customer satisfaction in the case of the moderate/casual restaurant, which are enjoying increasing protagonism in culinary tourism. Tourists go in search of cultural activities and typical cuisine, hence the gastronomic activity must offer an authentic experience. When restaurant authenticity is perceived by the customer to be low, their satisfaction will decrease significantly. In turn, loyalty and other aspects of CBBE, such as image or perceived value, are in danger of being affected, especially compared to the other type of restaurant. This is because customers who visit the moderate/casual restaurant have gone to the trouble of undertaking a thorough search beforehand, for the sole purpose of enjoying the authentic gastronomic experience.

However, in the moderate/casual restaurant, high customer satisfaction guarantees high CBBE, which generates customer loyalty and long-lasting relationships with the establishment, together with other aspects such as recommendation. Therefore, while both

types of restaurant must offer high levels of authenticity to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction (and, therefore, CBBE), it is the moderate/casual restaurant in particular that cannot afford to fail in its offer. Should levels of authenticity drop, this will be to the detriment of customer satisfaction, which will generate a loss of brand image and loyalty on the part of the customer.

For this reason, the moderate/casual restaurant should imbue its establishment with personality, use utensils and cutlery in the styles or materials typical of the area, and pay attention to the décor, including ornamental touches on the walls, and the use of colors and textiles. Employees should also be congruent with the culture the restaurant is seeking to convey, in their physical appearance, clothing, and communication (both verbal, and in their body language). The food itself must also meet authentic standards, such as the use of local ingredients, cooking methods, and the use of typical recipes from the area.

By way of example, [Plates 1 and 2](#) show the environment and the food at the moderate/casual restaurant used in our study and the mid-scale restaurant, respectively. In both cases, the dishes are carefully prepared and presented, using products typical of the local area. The mid-scale restaurant presents a nautical aesthetic typical of a fishing village, while the moderate/casual restaurant is more modern and sober in appearance. It is common for higher end restaurants to focus so much on achieving a modern look and unique touches that they sacrifice the authenticity that other establishments enjoy, such as the local neighborhood restaurant frequented by people from the area. But, according to our findings, it is much more important for moderate/casual restaurants, above all, to ensure that the customer remains satisfied in terms of authenticity, if they are to avoid a significant drop in CBBE.

It is important to note that these recommendations should be implemented gradually and naturally, bearing in mind the dangers of “staged authenticity” ([MacCannell, 1973](#)). Firms typically present culture as a product for sale; but if, in taking steps to “stage” authenticity for customers as if it were genuine, an aspect of the culture or history is distorted, then the true essence of authenticity is lost ([Sorokina et al., 2018](#)). According to some studies, this staging is perceived by customers as fake, leading them to feel



Plate 1.
Dining room and
example of dish
served at the mid-
scale restaurant

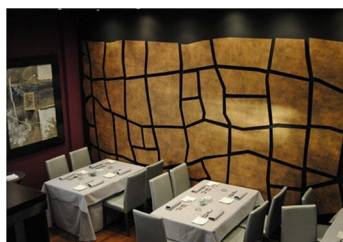


Plate 2.
Dining room and
example of dish
served at the
moderate/casual
restaurant

manipulated (Sorokina *et al.*, 2018); and, far from generating CBBE, this kind of “authenticity” generates negative, unfavorable attitudes toward the restaurant.

To address this, as recommended by Pine and Gilmore (2008), it is important that the restaurant owner understands and appreciates the heritage of the business, as this will influence its current positioning. It will also help in identifying those past strategic decisions that proved successful, compared to those that did not: successful decisions shape the restaurant’s history and thus will determine the restaurant’s perceived authenticity in relation to its corporate origins.

6.3 Limitations and potential future research

One limitation is that only two restaurants were used (each from a different category), hence, future studies should focus their efforts on analyzing two or more restaurants from the same category, to eliminate the bias associated with any specific circumstances of the particular restaurants analyzed. The replication of this study could also be conducted by comparing other types of restaurants with differentiated characteristics, to test whether the results obtained for these two types can be extrapolated to the rest.

Other possible studies for the future could include different antecedent variables of brand equity, or could consider the national culture of the sample subjects as a moderating factor when analyzing their evaluation of restaurant authenticity and its impact on brand equity. Furthermore, beyond culture, other factors such as advertising may affect how authenticity is perceived, and this needs to be taken into account in future studies.

Finally, in the research dealing with how to build solid brands (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018), given the marked growth in interest in authenticity as perceived by millennials, future studies could analyze perceived authenticity among this target public to observe the differences *vis-à-vis* brand equity formation in other generational segments.

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Further reading

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