The effect of brand experiences and relational benefits on loyalty in the fast-food restaurants

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this study is to examine the role of relational benefits and brand experience measurements on willingness to pay more (WPM), effects of word of mouth (WOM) and repurchase intention (RI) in fast-food restaurants (FFR).

Design/methodology/approach – Employing an online questionnaire survey with a sample size of 503 respondents, the quantitative methodology included multiple regression and factor analysis to facilitate the analyses of data.

Findings – Relational benefits and their dimensions (confidence, special treatment and social benefits) found to positively impact WPM, WOM and RI. With reference to brand experiences, the current study found that behavioural and intellectual experiences have significant and positive effects on WPM, WOM and RI. Surprisingly, no positive significance was identified between sensory experiences and WPM, WOM and RI.

Practical implications – The findings show that relational benefits and brand experience dimensions play an essential role in improving brand loyalty.

Originality/value – The current study subscribes to the concept of relationship marketing theory, suggesting that loyalty to FFRs can be enhanced by offering customers relational benefits and augmenting their brand experiences.

Keywords Relational benefit, Brand experiences, Repurchase intentions, Willingness to pay more, Word of mouth, Brand loyalty, Fast-food restaurants

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The exponential expansion of the fast-food sector nationally, internationally and culturally, is determined by alterations in customer lifestyles, improved disposable incomes and a fondness for convenience (Singh *et al.*, 2021). According to Carranza *et al.* (2018), service in fast-food restaurant (FFR) chains is restricted to being served at the counter, requiring customers to create their own experience. Accordingly, fast-food brands (for example, McDonald's and Burger King) find it difficult retain customers. Furthermore, as economies improve and customers have more dining options, FFRs have even lost their appeal. Moreover, today's customers demand valuable authentic dining experiences, which traditional fast-food establishments find difficult to provide (Carranza *et al.*, 2018). In other words, fierce competition within the sector necessitates strong dependence on customer

retention for survival (Singh *et al.*, 2021; Carranza *et al.*, 2018; Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2022). This underscores the importance of relationship marketing to increase customer value within fast-food establishments (Dandis and Wright, 2020).

Relationship marketing enables the hospitality and tourism sector to build long-term relationships, which can be perceived as profitable and mutually beneficial (Amoako *et al.*, 2019; Dagger *et al.*, 2011). It also strengthens the encounter between customers and these establishments by building strong relationships and converting impassive customers into dedicated customers (Dagger *et al.*, 2011). Loyalty is important to customer relationship management (CRM), as well as an important consideration in the marketing decision-making process (AboElHamd *et al.*, 2021; Dahana *et al.*, 2019; Qi *et al.*, 2012). This position demonstrates the importance of brand loyalty to service providers, particularly as the service they offer is almost always intangible (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2018). According to Gremler *et al.* (2020), declining customer base makes brand loyalty an even greater priority. In today's environment where customers can shop around online it is important to understanding how to increase their loyalty towards your brand – a position which can motivate researchers to develop models to enhance customer/brand loyalty.

Current literature demonstrates the different ways to quantify customer loyalty in the service industry, such as repeat purchases (e.g. Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Dandis *et al.*, 2021). Dandis and Wright (2020) suggest the use of attitudinal loyalty. Even so, measuring customers' brand loyalty by using multi-dimensional methods is important (Ong *et al.*, 2018; Dick and Basu, 1994; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Day, 1969). The multi-dimensional perspective submits that components of behaviour and attitude must be considered. For example, Engel and Blackwell (1982 cited in Hu *et al.*, 2010) described "true brand loyalty as preferred behavioural and attitude response to a brand or product articulated by customers over a period". Raimondo *et al.* (2008) stated that brand loyalty occurs because of repetitive purchases, commitment to a brand a positive attitude. Brand loyalty is multi-dimensional, considering both attitudinal and behavioural aspects (Dick and Basu, 1994). In the context of this study, willingness to pay more (WPM) and word of mouth (WOM), are classified as attitudinal loyalty. Equally, repurchase intentions (RIs) are classified as behavioural loyalty (Ong *et al.*, 2018).

Giving consideration to "relational benefits" and "brand experience", this research study's main emphasis is on the paradigm of relationship marketing theory in the hospitality industry. These two constructs are crucial for service providers in creating a persistent commitment and a sustainable business model by focussing on preserving and improving relationships with the existing service users (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, successful business–customer relationship can create increased future sales by means of customers' WPM, as well as their intentions to repurchase and share their experience with their social circle. Therefore, it is important for businesses to understand both dimensions of service problems and the potential solutions for them. This will allow them to demonstrate their ability to maintain customer loyalty in the competitive market environment.

Although brand experiences are vital in achieving business continuity (Ong *et al.*, 2018; Safeer *et al.*, 2021), as a construct in the hospitality fields, brand experience has been less researched (Khan and Rahman, 2017). According to the study by Safeer *et al.* (2021), prior research investigated the impact of brand experience on customer loyalty from various perspectives, such as emotional brand attachment, brand trust and love, sports event image, brand positioning, customer engagement and some other aspects. Moreover, Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) measurement of brand experience has only been tested with Western customers. However, obvious behavioural differences have been identified in Middle Eastern customers when they involve changing public perceptions. As such, there are noticeable differences in results obtained from Western customers in comparison to Eastern customers (Ong *et al.*, 2018). Hence, given the differences between Eastern and Western customers, researchers (for example, Safeer

et al., 2021; Ong *et al.*, 2018; and Khan and Rahman, 2017), advocated further research to test the measurement on other cultures. This implies that studies on relationship benefits and brand experiences in the FFRs have been largely ignored, particularly in emerging markets. Therefore, this research contributes to these discussions by addressing the calls of researchers to examine relational benefits (Dandis *et al.*, 2022a) brand experiences (Safeer *et al.*, 2021; Ong *et al.*, 2018) in a non-Western context. Moreover, not much is known about how each type of brand experience influence outcomes of CRM (Ong *et al.*, 2018).

Anchored on relationship marketing theory, the objective of this study is to investigate the role of relational benefits and dimensions of brand experience on WPM, WOM and repurchase intention (RI) in the FFRs in the Middle Eastern country of Jordan. In the current research, brand experience has been classified into four types: (1) "sensory, (2) affective, (3) intellectual and (4) behavioural" (Brakus *et al.*, 2009, p. 52). Additionally, this study's diagnostic value has been improved by classifying relational benefits into three different advantages: (1) "confidence benefits, (2) social benefits and (3) special treatment benefits" (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002, p. 230).

Thus, a major question arises from this paper – how does each type of brand experiences and relationship benefits influence RIs, WPM and WOM, in FFRs?

Based on previous discussions above, the intent of this study is to add to established literature by giving prominence to the following discussions:

(1) After a considerable review of leading hospitality and tourism industry journals related to marketing and marketing hospitality, we identified a dearth of research evaluating brand experiences, relationship benefits, RI, WPM and WOM, in FFRs. Moreover, most of the research regarding relationship marketing in the tourism and hospitality sector centres around the hotel industry (Agyeiwaah *et al.*, 2022), tourist destinations (Feng *et al.*, 2021) and the luxury restaurant sector (Jun *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, many of those studies were only carried out in the hospitality and tourism industry in developed countries (Ahn and Kwon, 2020; Cossío-Silva *et al.*, 2019; Jun *et al.*, 2017; Hyun and Kang, 2014). One neglected facet of relationship marketing in the hospitality industry is research on FFRs. Therefore, a main contribution of this study will be to focus on FFRs because they generate over $570 billion in revenue, more than the economic value of several nations (Angelou Economics, 2018). However, like most other industries, the foodservice industry is facing major challenges, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic (International Monetary Fund, 2020; Ozili and Arun, 2020 cited by Ponnaiyan *et al.*, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in several business shutdowns, operation reductions and major financial and job losses (Ozili and Arun, 2020; Salazar *et al.*, 2020 cited by Ponnaiyan *et al.*, 2021).

(2) Mindful of previous studies, this research was conducted on the competitive FFR sector in Jordan which is characterised by the changing pace of technology and steady market growth. Another major influencing factor for the growth of the Jordanian food industry is the entry of international brands, such as KFC, McDonald's and Pizza Hut (Ponnaiyan *et al.*, 2021). In the current environment, most of the top restaurant chains (e.g. McDonald's, Starbucks, KFC, Popeyes, Burger King, Hardee's, Subway, Pizza Hut) in Jordan operate as franchisees of US-based brands. These franchises offer international flavour and homegrown dining options, satisfying the tastes of the diverse population (Ponnaiyan *et al.*, 2021). For example, McDonald's mainly offers and vends hamburgers, chicken sandwiches, many types of chicken, wraps, French fries, salads and vegetarian options, soft drinks, breakfast items desserts (Wikipedia, 2022). In other words, each country offers a menu based on

their popularity amongst residents (Insider, 2020). Therefore, our research investigates RI, WOM and WPM of a sample of Jordanian residents. Relational benefits and brand experiences that apply to residents are experienced from local menus popular amongst residents (Insider, 2020). However, mass media advertising in venues for physical modes of eating out and transportation to and from restaurants and government regulations, such as COVID-19 rules for visiting restaurants in Jordan, are there for everyone to see and affect residents' perceptions regardless of the areas they live in. Uncontrollable forces (political, economic, competitive, cultural, social and religious) in the business environment have affected the hospitality industry including closure of some restaurants and hotels with restaurants (Hobbs, 2020), e.g. the phases of the COVID-19 pandemic (Turner and Akinremi, 2020) also affected consumer behaviour as residents were for brief periods, barred from external group socialising. The hospitality industry as with other catering industries has been in the forefront to be affected. Therefore, our study, by taking a proactive approach to research in understanding relational benefits and brand experiences, is important. Marketing strategies that can establish the success of a business and get ahead of competitors (Guo *et al.*, 2019; Ha and Jang, 2013) by delivering perceived benefits, enhancing value to customers would affect positively their attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Hasanat *et al.*, 2020; Nasution and Mavondo, 2008).

2. Background

2.1 Research model and hypotheses

Despite the paradigm of relationship marketing theory shifting from focus on acquisitions/transactions to focus on retentions/relations and the gradual increase of interest in the topic of loyalty, researches on antecedents of customer loyalty in the context of international service industry are still limited (Grandinetti *et al.*, 2020; Preece, 2015). Therefore, this research is the vehicle through which the role of relational benefits dimensions (confidence benefit, social benefits and special treatment benefits) brand experiences dimensions (sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual experiences) on RI, WOM and WPM, will be studied. These benefits and experiences improve customer loyalty. Our research framework, set out in Figure 1 illustrates this.

2.2 Relational benefits and customer true brand loyalty

The notion of "relational benefits" was borne out of the thinking that both customers and service providers benefit from established relationships (Kim and Ok, 2009; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). For service providers the benefit comes from revenue and cost, as it is harder to attract new customers than it is to maintain long-term relationships with existing customers (Kim and Ok, 2009; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). From customers' perspective, risks associated with purchase decisions can be avoided where a stable relationship exist, enhances self-esteem helps develop positive relationships with the service provider (Kim and Ok, 2009). These benefits can be focussed on "the core service or the relationship" (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). Relationship benefits include "confidence benefits, social benefits and special treatment benefits" (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002), which have been proposed as antecedents to brand loyalty.

2.2.1 Confidence benefits and customer true brand loyalty. Confidence benefits refer to awareness of decreased apprehension and contentment (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). According to Kim and Ok (2009), confidence benefits are made apparent when uncertainty is reduced during transactions expectations for service encounter is increased. Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2002) continue that confidence benefits significantly contribute to outcomes of
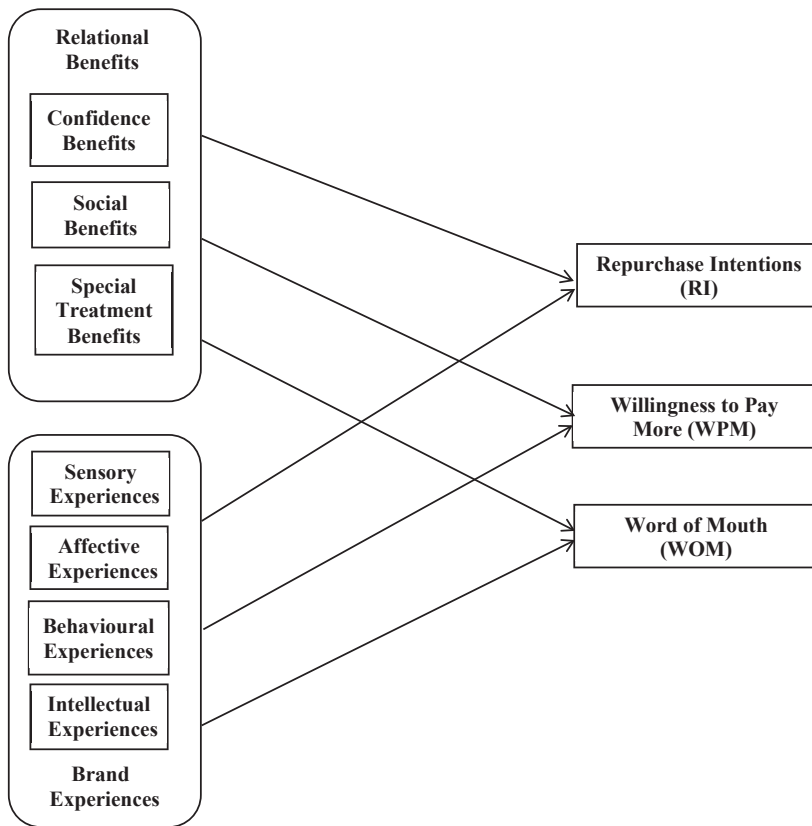
Figure 1.
Research framework and relevant hypotheses

relationship marketing in services. For example, Meldrum and Kaczynski (2007) found that confidence benefits are significant indicators of the enthusiasm of relationships. Chatzigeorgiou *et al.* (2019) found that confidence in a brand influences loyalty. This position is supported by Yang *et al.* (2017), who confirm that customer-CBs and identity-related benefits precede other loyalty rewards and underpin incentives associated with loyalty programmes. Dandis and Eid (2022) found that confidence benefits significantly impact WPM, WOM and RIs. This position is supported by Gremler *et al.* (2020), who found that loyalty is affected by relational benefits, although social and confidence benefits are more effective. In contrast with the findings of previous research, Channa *et al.* (2022) found that the negligible relationship between confidence benefits and customer loyalty could mean there is an element of mistrust between customers and business.

2.2.2 Social benefits and customer true brand loyalty. Social benefits materialise when customers establish a connection with providers (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). These [benefits] include pleasure and comfort due to familiarity and recognition by service employees (Kim and Ok, 2009). Furthermore, stimulation to continue the relationship and commitment to service providers stem from association and friendship personal recognition (Dagger *et al.*, 2011). Butcher *et al.* (2001) also found that friendship between customers and service providers play a pivotal role in the development of outcome relationships such as marketing. Interestingly, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2002) found that the concepts of social benefits

significantly contribute to improving the outcomes of relationship marketing in services. In support, Kim and Ok (2009) suggest that customers consider themselves "preferred" if they can identify a relational benefit, which in turn leads to the development of (a) loyalty to a service provider and (b) intent to make a repeat purchase from that provider.

Chang and Chen (2007) studied this development further by examining the connection between relationship benefits and customer loyalty. They found that social benefit influences both barriers to switching and loyalty. Kim and Ok (2009) found that social benefits directly impact affective commitment in the hospitality industry. Chou and Chen (2018) contribute that confidence and social benefits positively affect direct and indirect repurchase intention (RI). Channa et al. (2022) found significant positive influence of social benefits on customer loyalty, with significance being the effect of social benefits on both loyalty and e-loyalty of customers. For example, if through the vehicle of social media customers build strong bond with their tour operators, they will be more inclined to have favourable attitudes towards the operators, evidenced by customer repeat buying behaviour (Senders et al., 2013).

2.2.3 Special treatment benefits and customer true brand loyalty. Special treatment benefits are physical benefits provided to customers by service firms (Dagger et al., 2011). According to Kim and Ok (2009), these benefits are linked to economic and customisation advantages for customers, inducing feelings of importance and comfort. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002), special treatment benefits can be reduction in prices, expeditious and or personalised service. Furthermore, customers will relinquish relationships with other service providers if they do not receive special treatment when needed (Dagger et al., 2011). These actions bring into sharp focus "Social Exchange Theory", which "posits that relationships are formed via a subjective cost-benefit analysis and a comparison of alternatives" (Vaughn and Hogg, 2002 cited by Dagger et al., 2011, p. 274). Dagger et al. (2011) perceived that customers usually engage in relationships where perceived benefits outweigh any perceived costs. Furthermore, according to the principle of reciprocity, when customers receive special treatment, they feel compelled to reciprocate, fostering a commitment to that relationship (Dagger et al., 2011).

Channa et al. (2022) found special treatment benefits significantly influence customer loyalty. Dandis and Eid (2022) contribute that special treatment benefits significantly impact WPM, WOM and RI. Similarly, Kim and Ok (2009) found special treatment benefits directly and indirectly impact affective commitment in the hospitality industry. Accordingly, we assume the following hypotheses:

H1. (a) Confidence benefits, (b) social benefits and (c) special treatment benefits have a positive impact on RIs.

H2. (a) Confidence benefits, (b) social benefits and (c) special treatment benefits have a positive impact on WPM.

H3. (a) Confidence benefits, (b) social benefits and (c) special treatment benefits have a positive impact on WOM.

2.3 Brand experience and customer true brand loyalty
According to Han et al. (2020), brand experience is an important construct in branding literature, demonstrating how customer–brand relationship is built. Increased understanding of brand experience promotes appreciation of experiences evoked by brand-related stimuli (Han et al., 2020). Putting this into perspective, although brand experiences occur during consumption, it also occurs through direct and indirect interaction with a brand (Pina and Dias, 2021). The ability to encourage hedonic emotions and cognitive dimensions of brand equity makes experiential marketing effective (Ding and Tseng, 2015). In addition, when marketing practitioners understand how customers experience brands, they are better able to develop marketing strategies for goods and services (Brakus et al., 2009). Moreover, firms

could ultimately deliver emotional fulfilment for customers through the achievement of holistic brand experiences, which would enable extensive bonding and trust towards the brand (Han *et al.*, 2020).

The definition of brand experiences is termed as "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions), as well as behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 418). Brakus *et al.* (2009) suggest that brand experience is reflected by "sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural dimensions", making it a multidimensional construct. Several researchers (e.g. Safeer *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Ong *et al.*, 2018), identified "four dimensions: (1) sensory, (2) affective, (3) intellectual and (4) behavioural. Accordingly, discussions contained in the sections following aim to investigate the relationships between each brand dimension experience (i.e. sensory, affective and intellectual behavioural), on loyalty to a brand".

2.3.1 Sensory experience and customer's true brand loyalty. According to Shamim and Mohsin Butt (2013), customers' senses of vision, smell, taste and touch centres around sensory dimensions of brand experience. Sensory brand experience refer to physical experiences based on visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory and tactile encounters, for example, the sound of activity in the FFRs, the taste of the food, the beauty of the restaurant's skyline, or the smell of the restaurants (Barnes *et al.*, 2014). In other words, ambient conditions (for example, temperature, lighting, air quality, noise, music, scent and colour) affect the five senses (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2018). In turn, these physical responses may directly influence whether customers frequent and patronise fast-food environments. This is position is supported by Zeithaml *et al.* (2018), who found that comfort of seating in a restaurant influences how long customers stay. According to Al Mandil (2016), a comfortable seating arrangement is one principal characteristic which entices potential customers; this sensory experience is rated above all other subsequent evaluations and judgements.

Han *et al.* (2020) found that sensory and affective experiences are amongst the four first-order dimensions identified as the strongest factors of the Starbucks' brand experience. Similarly, visual aesthetics, taste, smell and music, are factors which influence customer satisfaction in restaurants (Han and Ryu, 2009; Jin *et al.*, 2012 cited by Ong *et al.*, 2018). Repeat patronage comes from customers who experience positive brand experiences, i.e. brand loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, product endorsement, which make them hesitant to switch to alternative brands (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). As identified by Brakus *et al.* (2009), customers value highly brands which afford them positive experiences, thus encouraging loyalty and commitment to that specific brand. Safeer *et al.* (2021) concludes that sensory experiences have significant indirect relationships with RPI, WOM and WPM.

2.3.2 Affective experience and customer true brand loyalty. As pointed out by Shamim and Mohsin Butt (2013), affective dimension refers to customers' emotions and feelings towards a brand. Affective brand experience also relates to "feelings, sentiments and emotions", e.g. being welcomed in a FFR or appreciation of a restaurant's architecture" (Barnes *et al.*, 2014). Although customers are purchasers of goods and services, they also purchase brands. This allows them to establish emotional relationships which expresses their personality and social identity (Pina and Dias, 2021). Han *et al.* (2009) posit that affective experience is paramount to attracting hospitality patrons' post-purchase decision-making process and behaviour (cited by Han *et al.*, 2020). According to Sina and Kim (2019), customers' affective commitment is enhanced by emotional brand experiences. Brand experiences is useful in stimulating customers' favourable response towards a brand by providing additional value, it exceeds the expectations of customers (Carrizo Moreira *et al.*, 2017).

When customers encounter favourable factors during their dining experience, (e.g. food quality, human interaction quality and furnishing quality), they usually become satisfied (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017). Wang *et al.* (2020) suggest that brand and affective contacts have a

positive impact on outcome relationship marketing. In the hotel industry and product sectors, such as the automotive industry, good relationship marketing was found to have a positive impact on the brand experience (Paulose and Shakeel, 2021; Şahin *et al.*, 2012). Ong *et al.* (2018) also found that influences of affective experience related to WOM and RI, but not WPM. In contrast, Safeer *et al.* (2021) found that affective experiences have significant indirect relationships with RPI, WOM and WPM. Pina and Dias (2021) stated that positive significant effect on brand loyalty could be because of affective experiences.

2.3.3 Intellectual experience and customer true brand loyalty. As identified by Barnes *et al.* (2014), thought, stimulation of curiosity problem-solving, e.g. an interesting restaurant, all relate to intellectual brand experience. The intellectual (cognitive) dimension involves customers' thoughts and the different ways in which they evaluate things (Shamim and Mohsin Butt, 2013). According to Al Mandil (2016), the main cognitive experience is to appeal to customers' creative thinking about a restaurant and its brand in a way that motivates customers to engage logical thinking that might lead to re-evaluation of companies and their brands. To reach the desired brand experience cognition is paramount. This highlights the personality of products by demonstrable characteristics and symbolic significance through elements such as interpretation, memory retrieval association (Al Mandil, 2016).

Moreover, a unique brand experience will increase customers' brand commitment making them less likely to switch to another brand (Seddon and Sant, 2007; Ramaseshan and Stein, 2014; Amoroso, 2020). This intellectual experience has a greater influence on brand trust than sensory or behavioural experience (Yu and Yuan, 2019). Ong *et al.* (2018) also found that intellectual experience affects perceptions of WPM, WOM and RI. Similarly, Safeer *et al.* (2021) found intellectual experience has an indirect but significant relationship with WPM, RIs and WOM. Interestingly, Pina and Dias (2021) found that experiences which are sensorial have positive and consequential effects on brand loyalty.

2.3.4 Behavioural experience and customer true brand loyalty. Behavioural dimension is about customers' life-targeting physical experiences (Shamim and Mohsin Butt, 2013). This experience also refers to physical actions, bodily experiences behaviours (Barnes *et al.*, 2014). For example, diners are usually involved in behavioural experiences such as photographing food presentations, ambiance/or helping to prepare the food. Furthermore, customers who are keen diners will readily demonstrate their loyalty (i.e. WPM, WOM and RI) (Ong *et al.* (2018). This behaviour is supported by Brakus *et al.* (2009), who found that brand experience has a behavioural impact on direct and indirect loyalty. The behavioural dimension of the brand experience positively impacts brand trust and commitment (Jung and Soo, 2012). According to Yu and Yuan (2019), trust may affect as well as influence behavioural experience by way of attachment. Akoglu and Özbek (2021) and Carrizo Moreira *et al.* (2017) also found that loyalty can be generated through brand experiences.

Akoglu and Özbek (2021) found that customers are usually inclined to repurchase from, recommend, or switch brands. This, according to Nysveen *et al.* (2013) is because significant influences on dimensions of brand experience can be categorised as personality, satisfaction loyalty. Ong *et al.* (2018) also found that behavioural experience influence related to WPM and WOM, but not RIs. Safeer *et al.* (2021) also found that the behavioural experiences have significant indirect relationships with RPI, WOM and WPM. Dwivedi *et al.* (2018) suggest that brand experience affects customers' influence, as well as direct or indirect WTP a premium price. Interestingly, Ding and Tseng (2015) found that brand experience indirectly impacts brand loyalty. Accordingly, we assume the following hypotheses:

H4. (a) Sensory, (b) affective, (c) intellectual and (d) behavioural experiences have a positive impact on RIs.

H5. (a) Sensory, (b) affective, (c) intellectual and (d) behavioural experiences have a positive impact on WPM.

H6. (a) Sensory, (b) affective, (c) intellectual and (d) behavioural experiences have a positive impact on WOM.

3. Research method and design
We used Google Forms survey administration software to assist with conducting an online survey. We distributed questionnaires via e-mail and social media groups, for example using WhatsApp and Messenger. Respondents were therefore able to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience (An *et al.*, 2019). Google Forms is known and used within Arabic culture, so questionnaires were easily translated into the Arabic language. Additionally, 27 respondents participated in a pilot study which was representative of respondents in the main study. Based on information gained from the pilot study, amendments were made to this study. The data collection period lasted from June 2021 to October 2021 targeting the top ten fast food chains in Jordan (i.e. Starbucks, KFC, Popeyes, McDonald's, Burger King, Hardee's, Subway, Pizza Hut, Papa John's Pizza and Domino's Pizza).

However, it is difficult with an online survey to calculate beforehand the response rate how many individuals might want to decline to participate even after accessing the link and seeing the survey. Accordingly, "only the number of completed surveys is known but not the number of refusals (Selm and Jankowski, 2006, p. 466), and the tracking non-response rate is not easy in most online surveys (Regmi *et al.*, 2017, p .642). Nevertheless, the sample size for this study exceeded the requirements suggested by Hair *et al.* (1999), i.e. a sample size of 200 may be required to ensure the appropriate use of maximum likelihood estimation, to generate valid fit measures and to avoid drawing inaccurate inferences (cited in Molina *et al.*, 2007, p. 260). Amat Taap *et al.* (2011, cited in Dandis, 2016, p. 10) reported that the subject to item ratio should be at least 10:1. For example, 31 items will be used in this study therefore a minimum of 310 respondents are required. This study shows that the sample size was 503 respondents to provide sufficient power for the statistical analyses (cited in Dandis, 2016, p. 10). In other words, while participation in the study was voluntary, completion of all the items was mandatory" (cited in Dandis and Eid, 2022, p. 481). Therefore, the online questionnaires had the data of the participants who completed the entire survey.

To handle the issue of construct validity and ensure the degree of accuracy of the questionnaires, factor analysis was carried out (Sohail and Shaikh, 2008). The following question about FFRs was posed to respondents: "Choose one FFR in Jordan from the following list that you feel you have a current relationship with". Once a FFR was chosen, the rest of the questions pertained to consumer evaluations of that FFR. A total of 503 completed questionnaires was received, which enabled a high statistical power level (Bowden-Everson *et al.*, 2013). A five-point Likert scale was used to measure items of the survey instrument to increase response rate and quality (Buttle, 1996). This, according to Hair *et al.*, (2013a, b) "is the best for research designs that use self-administered survey. Buttle (1996) also preferred to use the five-point Likert scale instead of the seven-point scale because it reduces the frustration level and does not mislead the customer" (Philip and Hazlett, 1997; Al Zaabi, 2006; cited in Dandis, 2016. p. 162). Moreover, many similar studies used the five-point Likert scale (e.g. Al-Gasawneh *et al.*, 2022; Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2022; Hammouri *et al.*, 2022; Han *et al.*, 2020; Dandis and Eid 2022; Joudeh *et al.*, 2021; Dandis *et al.*, 2021; Chou and Chen, 2018). Table 2 provides information on the measurement items.

4. Results and main findings
4.1 Descriptive statistics
Table 1 evidence characteristics of the research sample – 61.2% of respondents are females, 38.8% are males, with the vast majority (70.4%) educated to Undergraduate level.

Factor	Item	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	195	38.8
	Female	308	61.2
Education	High school or lower	50	9.9
	College	24	4.8
	Undergraduate	354	70.4
	Postgraduate	75	14.9
Age	Less than 18	18	3.6
	18–25	291	57.9
	26–35	117	23.3
	36–45	62	12.3
	46–55	8	1.6
	More than 55	7	1.4
Income (month)	Less than 250	160	31.8
	250–500	184	36.6
	501–750	49	9.7
	751–1,000	42	8.3
	1,001–1,250	20	4.0
	1,251–1,500	16	3.2
	1,501–2000	14	2.8
	More than 2000	18	3.6
How frequently do you visit this FFR in a month?	1–3 times	350	69.6
	4–6 times	112	22.3
	7–9 times	18	3.6
	10 or more times	23	4.6

Table 1.
Sample characteristics

This substantiates their ability to understand questions posed, as well as being able to judge service quality. 57.9% of all respondents are aged 18–25 years; 23% are aged 26–35 years Table 1 shows that the highest percentage (68.4%) of the research sample earned a monthly income of less than 500 Jordanian Dinars (500 JOD equivalent to 705 USD) (68.4%). This implies that respondents could be sensitive to changes in perceived service quality in the long-term may affect their satisfaction and commitment. Most respondents (69.6%) have visited the same FFR between one to three times a month (22.3%) between four to six times per month. This suggests it is a great indictor of time spent, evaluation of the restaurant any additional factor.

4.2 Measurement model
To satisfy the criterion of multivariate normality, i.e. skewness and kurtosis, normality tests were conducted. According to Chen (2012), skewness greater than 3.0 or the value of kurtosis greater than 8.0 could suggest an abnormal distribution. As shown in Table 2, multivariate normality is demonstrated by ensuring values of skewness and kurtosis are within acceptable levels.

4.3 Factor analysis
Table 3 shows evidence of the range for factor loadings as 0.784–0.962 for all items indicating that the factor strongly affects the variable (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). Only item 2 had a factor loading below 0.40, so this item was considered weak in the construct (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). The KMO statistic value range was 0.670–0.947, indicating the appropriateness of factor analysis (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, all measurements are robust in terms of their reliability. A summary of the factor analysis and reliability test results is presented in Table 3.

No.	Statement	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Confidence benefits (Dagger and O'Brien, 2010, p. 1551; Kim *et al.*, 2011)		
1.	"I have more confidence that services at this FFR will be performed correctly"	−0.894	0.688
2.	"I have less anxiety when I buy the service at this FFR"	−0.102	−1.124
3.	I know the service level when I go to this FFR	−1.031	1.028
4.	"I get the FFR 's highest level of service"	−0.672	0.034
	Social benefits (Ryu and Lee, 2017, p. 77)		
5.	"I am recognised by particular employee(s) at the FFR"	−0.041	−1.192
6.	"I am familiar with the employee(s) who perform(s) service at FFR"	−0.290	−0.935
7.	"I have developed a good relationship with the employees"	−0.028	−1.176
	Special treatment benefits (Ryu and Lee, 2017, p. 78; Kim *et al.*, 2011)		
8.	"I get discounts or special deals that most customers do not get"	0.262	−1.139
9.	"I get better prices than most customers"	0.403	−1.106
10.	"The restaurant performs services for me that it does not perform for most customers"	0.321	−1.154
	Sensory experience (Ong *et al.*, 2018; Kumar *et al.*, 2018, p. 607)		
11.	"This FFR brand is interesting in a sensory way"	−0.486	−0.537
12.	"This FFR brand makes a strong positive impression on my visual senses" or other senses	−0.412	−0.642
13.	"The appearance of this FFR pleases me"	−0.802	0.341
	Affective experience (Ong *et al.*, 2018, p. 765; Kumar *et al.*, 2018, p. 607)		
14.	"This FFR brand induces positive feelings"	−0.436	−0.541
15.	"I have strong positive feelings about this FFR brand"	−0.422	−0.575
16.	"This FFR puts me in a better mood"	−0.714	−0.064
	Behavioural experience (Ong *et al.*, 2018, p. 765; Kumar *et al.*, 2018)		
17.	"This FFR brand tries to remind me of activities I can do," such as taking photos of food presentation	−0.566	−0.540
18.	This FFR brand reflects my lifestyle	−0.069	−1.003
19.	I feel energetic after dining at this FFR.	−0.573	−0.400
	Intellectual experience (Ong *et al.*, 2018, p. 765; Kumar *et al.*, 2018)		
20.	"I engage in a lot of positive thinking when I encounter this FFR brand"	−0.381	−0.598
21.	"This restaurant brand stimulates my curiosity"	−0.318	−0.710
22.	This FFR encourages me to think with focus	−0.236	−0.972
	RI (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996; Gallarza-Granizo *et al.*, 2020, p. 102351)		
23.	"I want to buy more products from this FFR in the next few years"	−0.763	0.111
24.	Even if close friends recommended another FFR, I would not change my preference for this FFR	−0.506	−0.732
25.	I consider this FFR my first choice when I purchase the products they supply	−0.607	−0.410
	WPM (Ong *et al.*, 2018, p. 765)		
26.	"I am committed to this FFR brand"	−0.465	−0.545
27.	"I would be willing to pay a higher price for this FFR brand over other brands"	−0.320	−0.976
28.	"I would continue to eat at this FFR brand, even if its prices increase somewhat"	−0.411	−0.777
	WOM (Gallarza-Granizo *et al.*, 2020, p. 102351)		
29.	"I say positive things about this FFR to other people"	−0.669	−0.108
30.	"I recommend this FFR to someone who seeks my advice"	−0.679	0.012
31.	"I encourage friends and relatives to eat at this FFR"	−0.691	−0.075

Table 2.
Skewness and kurtosis
value of variables

4.4 Data analysis
Table 4 highlights the relationship between studied constructs, thereby providing an exploratory way to test the hypotheses. The seven independent variables (i.e. confidence benefits, social benefits, special treatment benefits, sensory, affective, intellectual

Variable	No. of item	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	KMO	Cronbach's alpha
Confidence benefits			2.272	56.808	0.720	0.831
	1	0.854				
	2	0.224				
	3	0.851				
	4	0.886				
Social benefits			2.519	83.953	0.747	0.904
	5	0.932				
	6	0.904				
	7	0.912				
Special treatment			2.763	92.085	0.778	0.957
	8	0.956				
	9	0.962				
	10	0.960				
Sensory experience			2.289	76.301	0.670	0.844
	11	0.915				
	12	0.915				
	13	0.784				
Affective experience			2.425	80.839	0.700	0.881
	14	0.921				
	15	0.933				
	16	0.840				
Behavioural experience			2.341	78.029	0.734	0.858
	17	0.897				
	18	0.859				
	19	0.876				
Intellectual experience			2.409	80.315	0.741	0.877
	20	0.883				
	21	0.901				
	22	0.904				
RI			2.462	82.079	0.741	0.887
	23	0.905				
	24	0.890				
	25	0.923				
WPM			2.553	85.100	0.754	0.911
	26	0.909				
	27	0.930				
	28	0.928				
WOM			2.711	90.383	0.774	0.947
	29	0.952				
	30	0.953				
	31	0.947				

Table 3.
Factor analysis and reliability analysis test

and behavioural), have a positive correlation with RIs, WPM and WOM in FFRs. This demonstrated that the hypotheses proposed are supported, based on the correlation coefficients.

Common method bias (CMB) is very important to the conducting of regression analysis (Safeer *et al.*, 2021; Ghosh, 2018). Therefore, we calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF) to assess the multicollinearity in data (Kock and Lynn, 2012; Channa *et al.*, 2022). Hair *et al.*,

(2013a, b) suggested that VIF greater than 10 is an indication of multicollinearity (cited by Ghosh, 2018). This study found less than 10 (range from 2 to 5) VIF values, indicating no multicollinearity issues in the data.

4.5 Hypotheses testing
The measurement model evaluation included reliability and validity with multiple regression to evaluate the hypothesised relationships among constructs in the research (Agag and El-Masry, 2017). Multiple regression was conducted using four separate analyses, namely:

(1) Confidence benefits, social benefits and special treatment benefits as independent variables and (1) RIs, (2) WPM and (3) WOM, as dependent variables. As can be seen in Table 5, confidence benefit is the most influential factor leading to RIs (Beta: 0.344) and WOM (Beta: 0.391), whereas special treatment benefit is very influential to WPM (Beta: 0.323)".

(2) Sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual experiences are independent variables and (1) RIs, (2) WPM (3) WOM are dependent variables. As can be seen in Table 5, intellectual is the most influential factor leading to RIs (Beta: 0.354) and

	RIs	WPM	WOM
Confidence benefits	0.483**	0.416**	0.512**
Social benefits	0.523**	0.572**	0.487**
Special treatment benefits	0.447**	0.557**	0.407**
Sensory	0.619**	0.616**	0.625**
Affective	0.659**	0.632**	0.681**
Behavioural	0.682**	0.711**	0.645**
Intellectual	0.713**	0.736**	0.666**

Table 4.
Correlation matrix

Hypothesis	Beta	Sig. value	Results
H1a: Confidence benefits → RIs	0.344	0.000	Supported
H1b: Social benefits → RIs	0.275	0.000	Supported
H1c: Special treatment benefits → RIs	0.147	0.013	Supported
H2a: Confidence benefits → WPM	0.257	0.000	Supported
H2b: Social benefits → WPM	0.217	0.000	Supported
H2c: Special treatment benefits → WPM	0.323	0.000	Supported
H3a: Confidence benefits → WOM	0.391	0.000	Supported
H3b: Social benefits → WOM	0.241	0.000	Supported
H3c: Special treatment benefits → WOM	0.122	0.039	Supported
H4a: Sensory experiences → RIs	−0.003	0.959	Not supported
H4b: Affective experiences → RIs	0.268	0.000	Supported
H4c: Behavioural experiences → RIs	0.199	0.000	Supported
H4d: Intellectual experiences → RIs	0.354	0.000	Supported
H5a: Sensory experiences → WPM	0.067	0.298	Not supported
H5b: Affective experiences → WPM	0.109	0.100	Not Supported
H5c: Behavioural experiences → WPM	0.260	0.000	Supported
H5d: Intellectual experiences → WPM	0.392	0.000	Supported
H6a: Sensory experiences → WOM	−0.027	0.693	Not supported
H6b: Affective experiences → WOM	0.406	0.000	Supported
H6c: Behavioural experiences → WOM	0.170	0.004	Supported
H6d: Intellectual experiences → WOM	0.250	0.000	Supported

Table 5.
Summary of the results
of hypotheses testing

WPM (Beta: 0.392), whereas the most influential factor leading to WOM is affective experience (Beta: 0.406). However, a negligible relationship between sensory and RIs, WPM and WOM has been found.

5. Discussion, implications and limitations

5.1 Discussion
One top priority for service researchers and mangers, according to Gremler *et al.* (2020), is to understand and manage the loyalty of customers. With a focus on marketing theory this study's primary objective is to investigate each component of relational benefits and brand experiences on WPM, WOM and RI in FFRs. In this current research, relational benefits were classified into three different advantage types: (1) "confidence benefits, (2) social benefits and (3) special treatment benefits." Brand experience was classified into four different advantages: (1) "sensory experiences, (2) affective experiences, (3) behavioural experiences and (4) intellectual experiences."

Concerning the relational benefits, results of this research identified the significant impact that "confidence benefits, social benefits special treatment benefits have on WPM, WOM and RIs. These results confirm previous empirical studies (Dandis and Eid, 2022; Chatzigeorgiou *et al.*, 2019; Dagger *et al.*, 2011; Kim and Ok, 2009; Meldrum and Kaczynski, 2007), which identified the important relationship between these variables and the positive impact on outcome relationship marketing. This indicated that relational benefits are critical for the development of marketing strategies for FFR.

As evident in Table 5, the data analysis shows that confidence benefits (such as confidence, feeling less anxiety) are the predominant influencing factors leading to RIs and WOM. This result is consistent with Gwinner *et al.* (1998), which advocate that the most significant relational benefit valued by customers is confidence benefit. Therefore, any reduction of confidence benefits is correspondingly affected when a provider tries to reduce customer choices or options. If all variables correspond, customers who value confidence benefits would be including these to choose their service firms (Ryu and Lee, 2017).

Evidence from the data analysis shows special treatment benefit as an extremely influential factor leading to WPM. This finding is consistent with Channa *et al.* (2022) and Dandis and Eid (2022), whose studies identified special treatment benefits as having a pronounced and positive impact on continued patronage. This indicates that when customers receive discounts, better prices or special deals from a FFR brand, they are likely to pay more, have RIs prompted by positive WOM. Also, the data analysis shows that social benefits do have a positive significant effect on WPM, WOM and RIs in the FFRs. These benefits can be identified as psycho-social, including emotions such as personal recognition, friendship, rapport, familiarity and social support. Within the concept of relationship marketing, customers highly value social benefits because without social interactions, relationship development cannot proceed (Ryu and Lee, 2017). This indicates that when customers are recognised by employee(s) and are familiar with employee(s), they would be willing to pay higher prices thereby generating favourable WOM.

Concerning brand experiences, not all dimensions have a significant and positive impact on WPM, RI and WOM. First, contrasting previous research, our study identified that sensory experiences do not influence WPM, RI and WOM. These results are inconsistent with previous studies which found sensory experience influence brand loyalty (Pina and Dias, 2021) influence WPM and RIs (Ong *et al.*, 2018). A possible explanation for these results might be that sensory experience indirectly impacts brand loyalty (Safeer *et al.*, 2021; Ding and Tseng, 2015), whereas this study investigated the direct impact of sensory experience on WPM, WOM and RI. Another possible reason could be that previous research on this topic

have been conducted in Western countries, hence their findings may not be generalised globally. Therefore, these findings extend our knowledge between constructs. Another possible explanation for this is a lack of sufficient attention to the sensory dimensions of the brand experience in FFR. For example, temperature, lighting, air quality, noise, scent and colour. These physical responses may, in turn, have a direct response on whether people stay in and enjoy [or not] a particular environment (Zeithaml et al., 2018). In other words, the sensory experience of FFR could be perceived by their customers to be homogenous across the top FFR and so could not be seen by customers as differentiating the restaurant. As a result, the sensory experience ought to be visually attractive and consistent with the type of service provided. The unanticipated result being the insignificant effect of sensory experiences on true brand loyalty requires further study.

Second, this research found that affective experience influence RIs WOM, but not WPM. These results are consistent with Pina and Dias (2021) and Ong et al. (2018), who found that a significant impact on a customer's exhibition of WOM and RI, but not on WPM, is affective experience. A possible explanation for such findings could be that consumers are encouraged of WOM and RIs if they experience favourable factors such as food standard, the quality of human contact, furnishing quality and perceived value (Jalilvand et al., 2017). However, the strength of such feelings may not be enough to encourage WPM (Ong et al., 2018). In other words, consumers may believe that prices charged are inexpensive and are unwilling to pay a higher price in one FFR over another. This indicates they would not continue or reduce the frequency in which they eat at a FFR should there only be a slight increase in its prices. A stronger influence is when consumers become more price sensitive when there are many competitors substituting for FFRs and when they think higher prices are not justified (Kotler et al., 2019).

Third, results of this research found that behavioural experience influence WPM, RIs and WOM. Our results are consistent with Ong et al. (2018) who identified behavioural experience as a major influencer on a customer's display WOM and WPM. However, from the current study's data analysis it can be deduced that FFR brands remind customers of activities they can participate in, (e.g. taking photos of food presentations), they also feel energetic after dining at this FFR this restaurant brand reflects their lifestyle.

Fourth, intellectual experiences have been found to influence WPM, RIs and WOM. These results echo Ong et al. (2018) who found behavioural experience has a major impact on customers' exhibition of WPM, RIs and WOM. However, the data analysis shows that customers engage in positive thinking and encouraging thinking with focus stimulates when they encounter this FFR brand. Also, the uniqueness of food offered trigger customers' curiosity about the recipe and mouth-watering flavours used to prepare the meal (Ong et al., 2018). This shows that brand experiences are crucial to the development of marketing strategies for FFR and other services industry (Brakus et al., 2009).

5.2 Theoretical implications

Previous research highlights the importance of relational benefits and brand experiences on loyalty, but few attempts have been made to understand how each of these individual constructs influences outcomes of CRM. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature (Dandis et al., 2022a; Dandis and Eid, 2022; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2019; Dagger et al., 2011; Kim and Ok, 2009; Meldrum and Kaczynski, 2007), by recognising how each type of brand experience and relationship benefits influence RIs, WPM and WOM, in FFRs, instead of focussing entirely on relational benefits and brand experience. More specifically, the current study found that relational benefits dimensions (confidence, special treatment and social benefits), positively impact WPM, WOM and RI. This indicates that relational benefits are critical for the development of marketing strategies in FFRs. Regarding brand experiences, the current study found that behavioural and intellectual experiences have both a significant

and positive impact on WPM, WOM and RI. Surprisingly, no positive significance was identified between sensory experiences and WPM, WOM and RI. Accordingly, results of this study confirm differences in results obtained from Western customers in comparison to Eastern customers (Ong *et al.*, 2018).

This study contributes to knowledge increase around the subject of brand management. Moreover, we found that customers loyalty can be measured using factors such as RI, WPM and WOM, which according to Ong *et al.* (2018), is a strategy highlighting both theoretical and managerial interests. Thus, we attempted to develop the new framework under relationship marketing theory by measuring its impact on true loyalty rather than consumer satisfaction, which can be less reliable (Dandis and Wright, 2020). In addition, our study seeks to fill the gap in Jordanian hospitality marketing literature, by being the primary study conducted in FFR in Jordan. Finally, this study has significant value for other FFRs, particularly those located in non-Western countries. The hope is that future research on this topic can use results of this study as a benchmark.

5.3 Managerial implications

This study's findings have important connotations for future practice. Regarding customer value benefits, relationship benefits are comprised of confidence, social and special treatment benefits. Thus, because of its central role in establishing customer loyalty, managers should inspire current customers' confidence to improve confidence benefits. In other words, decision makers should take advantage of opportunities to establish a "do it right first" approach (Berry *et al.*, 1990). Moreover, restaurants must exercise caution and comply with established COVID-19 protective guidelines, including social distancing and hand-washing hygiene (World Health Organization, 2020). To improve social benefits, decision makers in FFR should focus on personal and human aspect. For example, technological initiatives which brings restaurants closer to customers (i.e. social networks and electronic mail). The personal aspect (e.g. addressing customers by their names and personalising addressees in FFR), should also be valued by employees (Channa *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, open and honest communications between employees and customers in FFRs could quickly blossom into something more personal, i.e. collaborative working as "friends" rather than business contacts (Dandis, 2016). To improve special treatment benefits, decision makers should pay attention to loyal or special customers by offering discounts, special deals and rewards. These benefits can maximise the continuance value of customers by providing incentives to bring about favourable WOM and encourage repurchase behaviour (Dandis and Eid, 2022).

Our findings demonstrate that experience with brands is significant to the improvement of true brand loyalty. This is because sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses help customers develop emotions for brands. If emotions are positive, customers remain loyal, demonstrating repurchase intent. In recent years, branding theory has focussed on the development of the customer–brand relationship (Akoglu and Özbek, 2021). Therefore, to enhance RI, WPM and WOM, FFR should use experiential perceptive marketing strategies which allows the development of strong bonds with customers to maintain their loyalty. These strategies can be implemented with the aid of social media platforms to have a positive influence on customers (Safeer *et al.*, 2021).

When designing brand experiences it is recommended that marketing managers consider the positive emotions of customers which are immersed in the dining experience, as well as touchpoints with diners. Some examples of positive emotions are love, romance, peacefulness, contentment, excitement, optimism and joy (Al Mandil, 2016). Interestingly, to make customers happy, McDonald's and Coca-Cola often use the colour red in their branding pictures of people smiling. Additionally, McDonald's has play areas for children whilst Coca-Cola has The World of Coca-Cola Museum. In these environments, customers of both fast-food establishments can enjoy themselves in "a happy place" (Ding and Tseng, 2015).

It is also crucial to communicate the restaurateurs' personality with customers at an intellectual level. This can be portrayed in the form of symbolic significance of the restaurants, using the elements of interpretation, memory retrieval association in customers' mind (Al Mandil, 2016). The dining experience of customers should revolve around the meals that delight all the senses, along with the highest standards of quality. Crafting the symbolism of the restaurant experience would require the sole customer experience of being socialised, being nourished and enjoying the authenticity of the service environment (Akroush *et al.*, 2013). This intellectual experience is, arguably, more influential than behavioural experience on creating brand trust (Yu and Yuan, 2019).

This research has proved that behavioural brand experience has a positive influence on customers' WPM, their intention to repurchase and share their experience with their social circle. The marketing managers should emphasise creating a positive atmosphere that reinforces behavioural experiences of customers (Ong *et al.*, 2018; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2018). The service design, process, restaurant layout and the setting are crucial to impact on the target customer's expectation and offer an enjoyable brand experience (Akroush *et al.*, 2013). Employers and their employees need to show their willingness to invest in customer engagement solutions for the best results (Ross, 1995).

Branded restaurants promote certain lifestyles and cultures, relating customers to these lifestyles or cultures which makes them feel socially accepted (Al Mandil, 2016). Although sensory experience plays the least important role in influencing RI, WPM and WOM, the importance of sensory experience must not be ignored. Therefore, decision makers should factor budget allocations to renovating and refurbishing their establishment's physical space to improve RI, WPM and WOM. Moreover, integrating the brand colours into employees' uniform and the restaurant's internal design, strengthens and solidifies brand imagery which customers can identify (Pina and Dias, 2021; Dandis and Wright, 2020).

In sum, this study provides FFR managers important recommendations on how to improve their CRM, but these recommendations are limited to domestic customers. Therefore, according to the data, we cannot be sure that they apply also to tourists. It is recommended that restaurant owners and their managers examine further the relational benefits and brand experiences that apply to tourists too. Restaurant owners wanting to cater for international tourists should also collect data on the consumer tastes of international tourists in their restaurants to attract them to their menus. Managers should consider customer benefits by paying attention to customer value components, such as those relating to emotional, social and information value, to better maintain customer relationships and make adjustments to the changes of market during pandemic, and the new normal situation.

5.4 Limitations and future research

Every effort was made to avoid issues during the conduct of this research, but nevertheless, limitations were identified which need to be considered. First, we utilised a cross-sectional design to broaden understanding of the impact of each component of relational benefits and brand experiences on WPM, WOM and RI in FFR in Jordan. Additional research could examine long-term effects of independent variables on WPM, WOM, RI. Second, it would be useful to test our framework in other countries to understand differences. The model could be tested with other service providers, for example airlines, banks, hotels, consulting firms, hospitals, loan agencies and tourist destinations. This would allow for a comparison of findings within other areas because other factors dictate customer behaviours, e.g. habits of customers, culture, levels of income and commerce (Channa *et al.*, 2022). Third, future research could consider how relational benefits and brand experiences affect other factors, i.e. electronic WOM, corporate image brand equity, brand love, perceived value and relationship quality. Finally, a future study for research taking into account tourists would be of benefit. The current study is based on the sample of residents. The relational benefits and brand experiences that apply to

residents may not be the same for tourists, especially considering that each country offers menus based on their popularity amongst residents (Insider, 2020). However, a comparison between residents and tourists from specific countries could also be an interesting option for further research which could delve into how restaurants do their marketing strategies and provide for the consumer tastes of international tourists in their menus.

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