Restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation of specialty restaurants in Calabarzon region: Basis for restaurant branding framework

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the restaurant experience, brand equity and brand reputation of specialty restaurants in the CALABARZON Region. Particularly, described the demographic profile of the respondents; assess the restaurant experience of the specialty restaurant; determine the brand equity of the specialty; identify the brand reputation of specialty restaurant; test the significant difference in restaurant experience, brand equity and brand reputation when grouped according to profile variables; test the significant relationship of restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation; and propose a framework for restaurant experience, brand equity and brand reputation of the specialty restaurant in CALABARZON region. The researcher utilizes a quantitative-descriptive research design that used descriptive correlation analysis. This research design aims to describe the variables and relationships that occur naturally between and among them. Results revealed there was a significant difference in terms of sex, specifically in the quality of food on the assessment on restaurant experience when compared according to profile, it also reveals that none of the respondent's profiles are significantly different in the ratings. Further analysis shows that females have higher ratings on the said indicator as compared to males. There is a significant relationship between restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation. Moreover, the three indicators are highly connected to some aspects of specialty restaurants specifically the quality of food, brand identification and customer centricity and empathy. The strong direct correlation of restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation complements each other leading to a strong foundation of specialty restaurants to sustain in the food and service industry.

Keywords: brand equity, brand reputation, restaurant experience, restaurant industry, specialty restaurant

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1. Introduction

Restaurant managers who desire to be successful are required to create a branding. Restaurant branding is crucial for creating a distinct and memorable identity that attracts customers and fosters loyalty. The achievement of these factors may create a positive perception of the company's image by their customers and the general public which influences brand reputation. However, socio-economic conditions and health rules of customers make it necessary to serve food and beverage services based on conscious and scientific ground rather than a random service. In addition, changes in shopper ways of life may have prompted an expansion in the interest for changed eating encounters and to the quick development in the food service industry. This improvement has affected the presence of numerous specialty restaurant which much of the time construct solid brands with a specific end goal to fortify competitiveness and brand equity with the goal that customers are capable to perceive the restaurant business (Ramzan & Ahmad, 2018). Moreover, food and beverage enterprises in the service industry with an incrementally increasing number and serving a wide range of customers from different social-economic levels, are required to meet customer expectations and demands to survive in a competitive environment, increase brand trust, perceived quality, and brand identification (Solunoğlu,2019).

Nowadays, restaurants must be competitive in terms of restaurant experience, not just focusing on food but also on the restaurant premises and personalized service. These are also used in attracting guests. Restaurants are one of the businesses in the service industry. In addition, one of the primary goals of restaurants is to provide customers with satisfaction and attract and retain customers. Negative guest experience during dining has various factors such as dissatisfied on service and lack of personalization, all of which are factors that affects brand reputation. Similarly, restaurants need to develop strategies to make each experience memorable. On the other hand, brand equity is the perception of the brand's value in the minds of the customers. It is based on factors such as brand prestige, brand identification, brand trust, and perceived quality. A strong brand equity can lead to increased customer satisfaction, as customers are more likely to trust and recommend a brand that they have a positive perception of (Han et al., 2021). Brand reputation is the public perception of a brand's character and trustworthiness. It is based on factors such as customer centricity and empathy, corporate attractiveness, and emotional bond. Strong brand reputation can lead to increased customer satisfaction, as customers are more likely to feel confident in a brand that they have a positive perception of (Anggani & Suherlan, 2020). All these factors can interact with each other to affect customer satisfaction. For example, a restaurant with a strong brand equity and a positive restaurant experience is more likely to have satisfied customers. Similarly, a restaurant with negative restaurant experience can damage its brand equity and brand reputation, leading to decreased customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, customer experience and brand reputation are two of the most important factors that businesses need to consider to be successful. Restaurant experience is the total of all the interactions that a customer has with a brand, from the first time they hear about it to the last time they patronize its products or services. Brand reputation is the perception that customers have of a brand, based on their experiences with it and the information that they have gathered about it. Researchers commented that service quality, food quality, and quality of the environment are related to brand reputation, and this quality turns into a device that can show a decent or awful reputation (Ramzan & Ahmad, 2018). Having a decent reputation guarantees development in ubiquity through empathy, corporate attractiveness, and an emotional bond to the brand. Interestingly, uncertain item quality may have a negative impact on building a brand reputation encourage this relationship by demonstrating that specialty restaurants have preferred quality over autonomous restaurants due to the reputational motivating forces of the chain. The reputation that a brand has can also influence the way that

customers experience that brand. If a brand has a positive reputation, customers are more likely to be willing to give the brand a try and to be patient with any problems that they may encounter.

Brand equity can influence brand reputation. A strong brand equity can help to create a positive brand reputation. This is because consumers are more likely to have positive associations with a brand that they are familiar with and that they trust. Brand reputation can influence brand equity. A positive brand reputation can help to increase brand equity. This is because consumers are more likely to be willing to pay a premium for products and services from brands that they have a positive perception of. In the Philippines, restaurant establishments faced operational problems such as brand prestige, quality of service, food quality, and atmosphere or ambiance. Furthermore, restaurants use various strategies to cope with the operational problems they encounter (Jayson et al., 2023) Restaurants need to conceptualize strategies to improve customer experience and brand equity to improve their reputation in the market. Specifically, CALABARZON region plays an important role in the tourism industry and displays many restaurants because of its attractiveness to tourists (Valdez, 2019). This makes the restaurant or food industry boom in this region. Another is because of its popular dishes and its delicacies that are locally produced by restaurants. This region is visited by diverse tourists not only from the Philippines but also by foreigners, specialty restaurants became a demand to cater to the needs and wants of the tourist through food and drinks. Specialty restaurants create and project an attractive destination image (Mohamed, 2022).

However, there is little research that has explained the relationship between restaurant experience and brand equity in relation to brand reputation. There is a lack of literature and research about factors of brand equity in relation to brand reputation. There has been a limited focus in the Philippine context specifically in restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation in the region. The increased demand for comparatively authentic cuisine and dishes, appealing restaurant interiors, unique services that specialty restaurants offered in the CALABARZON Region has increased the number of this kind of restaurants. As a result of this situation, the competition among specialty restaurants is also increasing. Restaurant experience and brand equity are factors that would help specialty restaurants to analyze the most important element of a product or service by customers which leads to good brand reputation. In this highly competitive restaurant business environment, specialty restaurants can identify their position with regard to restaurant experience and brand equity.

The study determined the relationship of restaurant experience and brand equity influence the brand reputation of the restaurant. Restaurant experience, through generating high-quality guest experience in restaurants, possibly build a good brand reputation. Restaurant experience involves three criteria, quality of food, quality of service and environment, food quality and quality of physical environment (Yrjölä, et al, 2019). Brand equity is the outcome of efficient branding activity investment; it helps in the development of marketing strategies that align with guest needs who wants to have a high-quality restaurant experience and to establish brand reputation. Brand equity use four dimensions: brand prestige, brand identification, brand trust, and perceived quality (Han et al, 2021). Brand reputation is reflected as a valued intangible asset of a brand. In the service sector, reputation is specifically important, given the services' intangible appeal and the difficulty in assessing without experiencing it. Moreover, brand reputation means more than keeping consumers satisfied. It is used to measure how trustworthy, reputable, and honest a brand is. Its sub-variables are customer centricity, corporate attractiveness, and emotional bond (Burlea-Schiopoiu, & Balan, (2021).

Additionally, the output of this study is a framework that is based on the result of the study on the correlation among restaurant experience and brand equity and brand reputation of the specialty restaurant in CALABARZON region. The result shows robust and positive direction relationship among these three key factors. The framework has practical and managerial implication to the restaurant industry particularly in specialty restaurant. Thus, recommend that the greater the positive changes in both the restaurant experience and brand equity, the more the favorable the overall brand reputation becomes. In addition, the holistic understanding that can guide strategic decision making for restaurant aiming to a sustained success, positive impact on the bottom-line and to strengthen their overall brand perception. The researcher developed a brand reputation

framework for improving the reputation of specialty restaurants in the CALABARZON region by presenting a systematic framework of restaurant experience and brand equity.

Objectives of the study - This study assessed the restaurant experience, brand equity and brand reputation of specialty restaurants in the CALABARZON Region and formulate restaurant branding framework. Particularly, it assessed the restaurant experience of the specialty restaurant relevant to the quality of food, service, and physical environment; determined the brand equity of the specialty restaurant in terms of prestige, identification, trust, and perceived quality; identified the brand reputation of specialty restaurant relevant to customer centricity and empathy, corporate attractiveness and emotional bond; tested the significant relationship of restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation; and proposed a restaurant branding framework for a specialty restaurant in CALABARZON region.

2. Methodology

Research Design - The researcher utilized a quantitative-descriptive research design that used descriptive correlation analysis. This research design aims to describe the variables and relationships that occur naturally between and among them. The design was utilized in investigating the relationship between restaurant experience, brand equity, brand reputation and the demographic of the respondents. Sample findings show the difference in the assessment of the respondents on restaurant experience when compared according to profile. It reveals that none of the respondent's profile influences their rating except that of sex specifically on quality of food only. This indicates that being a male or female can produce a significant difference on their rating. Further analysis also shows that females have higher rating on the said indicator as compared to males.

Participants of the Study - The following are set of criteria for respondent's qualification; first, the participants must be of legal age, have experienced dining, at least twice in a specialty DTI registered restaurant in the province of CALABARZON Region and lastly, respondents are willing to take part in the study. Majority of specialty restaurants are casual dining service and offer a relaxed dining atmosphere, most offered and specialized in Asian cuisine menus and dominant to the list are Filipino cuisine, followed by the Japanese cuisine, Korean, Chinese, Thai and more. Specialty restaurants in the Region which consists of five provinces such as Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and lastly Quezon together with its number of guests per month and the sample sizes per restaurants. The proponent asked the restaurant managers on the estimated number of guests per month for each restaurants and was categorized by province in the region; after that, it is submitted to the school statistician and computed it using stratified sampling technique using RAO Soft Calculator having 387 total number of respondents.

Data Gathering Instrument - A modified adapted questionnaire was utilized in this study; the instrument is composed of four parts, the first part is about the demographic profile of the respondents according to age, sex, marital status, educational attainment, and times of visit. The second part is about the assessment of restaurant experience in terms of the quality of food, quality of service, and quality of the physical environment adapted from the study of Yrjölä, et al (2019). The third part of the questionnaire is the assessment of brand equity in terms of brand prestige, brand identification, brand trust, and perceived quality. This is adapted from the study of Han, et al (2021). The last part of the study is about the brand reputation relevant to customer centricity and empathy, corporate attractiveness and emotional bond and was adapted from Burlea-Schiopoiu & Balan, (2021). The instrument then was validated and tested its reliability with the following steps: the proponent sought the help of the adviser to check the instrument if it is aligned with the objectives and adhered to the inputs of the panelist during the defense; secondly, the grammarian checked the sentence construction, spelling, and wordings; third was the content validation, the instrument was validated by five experts in the restaurant industry. There were few minimal suggestions, and the proponent followed those suggestions. Fourth step was the pilot testing of the instrument to a specialty restaurant, it was distributed to 40 respondents who experienced to dine in a specialty restaurant, the place of the test should not be covered in the scope of the study. The fifth step was the statistical validation, and the last step was the reliability internal consistency wherein the result must be >.9->.

The reliability test findings on evaluating restaurant experiences indicate that the food quality received a score of 0.766, signifying acceptable. Following closely is the service quality, which garnered a rating of 0.733, also denoting acceptable. Lastly, the physical environment quality achieved a score of 0.855, indicating a good level. A separate reliability test focused on evaluating brand equity revealed that brand prestige scored 0.704, denoting acceptable. Following this, brand identification achieved a rating of 0.808, indicating a good level. The third aspect, brand trust, received a score of 0.914, signifying excellent. Additionally, perceived quality earned a rating of 0.857, reflecting good level. Finally, the reliability test examining brand reputation assessment revealed that the initial indicator, customer centricity and empathy, received a score of 0.783, indicating acceptability. Subsequently, corporate attractiveness obtained a rating of 0.818, signifying a good level. Lastly, the emotional bond scored 0.809, also reflecting a good standing.

Data Analysis - After all the data were encoded, tallied, and analyzed using various mathematical approaches dependent on the task, the researcher used the Weighted mean and rank were used to determine the restaurant experience in terms of quality of food, quality of service, and quality of physical environment. To determine the brand equity in terms of brand prestige, brand identification, brand trust and perceived quality. To determine the brand reputation in terms of customer centricity and empathy, corporate attractiveness, and emotional bond. And other statistical methods such as Weighted Mean, and Pearson product-moment Correlation.

Ethical Consideration - Bias can be avoided throughout the conduct of the study. Before conducting a survey, agreement from respondents was obtained to ensure the formality and legality of the study's conduct; in the consent, the study's objectives and survey technique were indicated. These were completed so that they could provide factual, practical, and easy answers. As a result, the researcher secured their safety and complete security not to lose their trust. The research methodology followed ethical guidelines. It is possible to state that all respondents' decisions to participate in this study were voluntary, and those decisions were made with full awareness. Respondents are given the freedom to engage without fear of repercussions, penalties, or loss of privileges. The rights of respondents to the body of information shall be carefully evaluated and protected. If they had any objections or worries about the terms and conditions stated, if they believed the questions were too difficult to grasp or were in poor physical condition throughout the study, they had the choice to halt and not restart the survey. On the other side, confidentiality denotes that the research participants' data will not be disclosed to anybody else. Personal information that is requested for the study will be kept private and confidential by the researcher. All information obtained from respondents was kept strictly confidential. The researcher assures them that their personal information will be kept secret to some extent and that all their replies will be kept in the researcher's custody and will not be accessible to anyone else. Everything was maintained safe and steady. Technical jargon would be eliminated from research questions, making them easier for respondents to grasp. It will give respondents a fair idea of the practical benefits of the study.

3. Results and discussions

Table 1

Summary Table of the Respondent's Assessment on Restaurant Experience

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Quality of Food	4.53	Strongly Agree	1
Quality of Service	4.49	Agree	2
Quality of Physical Environment	4.48	Agree	3
Composite Mean	4.50	Agree	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 shows the summary of restaurant experience with a composite mean of 4.50 and a verbal interpretation of agree. Among the three indicators, quality of food got the highest rank and has weighted mean of 4.53 and a verbal interpretation of strongly agree, followed by quality of service with a weighted mean of 4.49 and a verbal interpretation of agree, and lastly, quality of physical environment with lowest mean of 4.48 and a

verbal interpretation of agree. Guests in a restaurant pay primarily for food, they are willing to pay more for food that is of high quality and return if they get positive dining experience. Aside from taste, food that is served at a proper temperature and well-cooked as well as the right amount of portion is vital for guest satisfaction. Food nutritional value is another factor in choosing a restaurant, heathy food and fresh dishes must be part of a restaurant experience to build a good restaurant reputation.

Yet another important element in shaping the overall restaurant experience is the quality of the food. The standard of food has a substantial impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. This encompasses considerations such as taste, presentation, the array of menu items, and the cleanliness of service areas. A study conducted by (Abdullah et al, 2018) substantiates that food quality plays a significant role in determining customer satisfaction and the likelihood of customers returning to the establishment. This highlights the significance that consumers place on quality, health, and environmental aspects when buying food products. Research indicates that the most frequently considered factors by consumers in evaluating food quality are freshness, taste, and appearance. These factors play a special role in their perception of the food's healthiness, considering elements such as ingredients, nutrition facts, additives, packaging, food origin, and production methods. In conclusion, the study suggests that food quality garners significant attention, particularly concerning health and environmental cues, contributing to efforts aimed at enhancing consumers' well-being.

It seems that each restaurant has its way of attracting customers and prioritizes a unique identity and style. Specialty restaurants often align their physical spaces with the motive behind their cuisine. The focus appears to be on creating an atmosphere that complements the culinary identity they are offering. This personalized approach allows for a diverse range of restaurant styles, each contributing to the overall dining experience in its own way. This perspective shows that diners place a higher value on the distinct personality and character of a restaurant, which goes beyond the physical layout. This may also influence the overall perception of the dining experience. Physical environment tends to be a less prominent role when it comes to assessing the overall restaurant experience. Even the quality of physical environment got the least on the assessment of customers, still it is one of the criteria and reasons why customers came back to dine. In a study of Marder et al. (2019), the ambiance of the physical environment is a crucial factor in shaping the guest experience. Customers typically notice the service staff first, followed by the facility, and lastly, the overall restaurant ambience. Having service staff that appear pleasant is particularly important in a dining experience, considering they are the initial and final points of contact for customers. The quality of service provided by the staff plays an important role in influencing the overall restaurant experience for customers. However, the impact of the physical environment on customer satisfaction in restaurants remains substantial, encompassing various factors and dimensions, including the service staff, facilities, layout, ambience, lighting, and more.

Table 2

Summary Table on Respondent's Assessment of Brand Equity

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Brand Prestige	4.47	Agree	4
Brand Identification	4.54	Strongly Agree	1
Brand Trust	4.51	Strongly Agree	2
Perceived Quality	4.50	Strongly Agree	3
Composite Mean	**4.51**	**Strongly Agree**	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 summarizes respondents' assessment of brand equity which has a composite mean of 4.51 and a verbal interpretation of strongly agree. Amongst all the indicators, brand identification ranks first with a weighted mean of 4.54 and a verbal interpretation of strongly agree, and second in rank was brand trust with a weighted mean of 4.51 and a verbal interpretation of strongly agree. Brand identification is the most important aspect of brand equity because it is the foundation upon which all other elements of brand equity are built. Without brand identification, customers cannot recall, recognize, or differentiate the brand from competitors.

Having a brand that is well-identified will increase the brand we call it and brand recognition. It will have brand positioning and will have a greater potential for brand growth. Brand loyalty is impacted by brand identification, indicating that the social psychology of consumption plays a role in fostering loyalty. Customers often seek social approval by engaging with and endorsing brands through their consumption choices. To strengthen brand identification, brands should pay attention to key factors. These include the choice of symbols or logos, ensuring the brand image aligns with customer concepts, and crafting meaningful brand experiences (Han et al., 2021). Additionally, the connection between brand identification and consumer relationships plays a crucial role in evolving into broader community interactions. Social media platforms offer a valuable avenue for brands to cultivate positive attitudes, fostering trust and loyalty as eventual outcomes.

On the other hand, perceived quality was the third in rank with a weighted mean of 4.50 and a verbal interpretation of strongly agree, followed by brand prestige with a weighted mean of 4.47 and a verbal interpretation of agree. Brand prestige is a component of brand equity, but it is generally considered to be less important because it is a more subjective and nuanced concept than other aspects. It is also more difficult to measure and quantify. It also has a long-term impact; it takes time to build and can be easily eroded by negative publicity or poor product performance. The concept of brand prestige is tied to the degree of exclusivity a brand offers, fulfilling the self-enhancing needs of its customers. Moreover, it poses a challenge as cultivating a positive and superior brand image is a crucial factor in achieving brand prestige. One effective method to enhance a positive brand image is through celebrity endorsements. This suggests that customers develop a favorable perception of a brand when the endorsing celebrity possesses attractive features and is deemed trustworthy.

Table 3
Summary Table on Respondents' Assessment of Brand Reputation

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Customer Centricity and Empathy	4.48	Agree	1
Corporate Attractiveness	4.28	Agree	3
Emotional Bond	4.41	Agree	2
Composite Mean	**4.39**	**Agree**	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 summarizes respondent's assessment of brand reputation with a composite mean of 4.39 and a verbal interpretation of agree, Of all the indicators, customer centricity and empathy ranks first with a weighted mean of 4.48 and a verbal interpretation of agree, following on the second rank was emotional bond with a weighted mean of 4.41 and a verbal interpretation of agree, and on the third rank was corporate attractiveness with a weighted mean of 4.28 and a verbal interpretation of agree.

Customer centricity and empathy are vital for brand reputation in specialty restaurants because they foster positive customer experiences and build lasting relationships. When restaurants prioritize understanding and responding to the needs and preferences of their customers, they create a sense of connection and trust that enhances the overall dining experience and contributes to a strong brand reputation. Aside from this, customer centricity and empathy personalize the experience of guest. They learn to always interact and be courteous. They become transparent and truthful in all information that is given once asked by a customer. A business's brand reputation is of utmost importance and is cultivated through how the business demonstrates care and connection with its customers. Establishing a positive reputation requires employees to adopt a customer-centric mindset and incorporate customer empathy across the organization The physical appeal, encompassing the ambiance and the restaurant's overall aesthetics, indeed plays a role in establishing a connection with customers. However, it becomes evident that this is not the primary factor that draws customers back. Instead, the restaurant staff places a greater emphasis on the offerings, particularly the authenticity and quality of the food. For customers of specialty restaurants, the key determinant influencing their repeated visits is the genuine and high-quality culinary experience rather than the physical attractiveness of the establishment. As it is considered least, it does

not mean that it is not that important at all to create and build brand reputation. This suggests that the restaurant's physical appearance contributes to repeat purchases, thereby enhancing customer patronage. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize and carefully consider the physical aesthetics of the establishment.

Table 4

Relationship of Restaurant Experience to Brand Equity

Quality of Food	r	p-value	Interpretation
Brand Prestige	.464**	.000	Significant
Brand Identification	.580**	.000	Significant
Brand Trust	.719**	.000	Significant
Perceived Quality	.649**	.000	Significant
Quality of Service			
Brand Prestige	.285**	.000	Significant
Brand Identification	.685**	.000	Significant
Brand Trust	.729**	.000	Significant
Perceived Quality	.754**	.000	Significant
Quality of Physical Environment			
Brand Prestige	.398**	.000	Significant
Brand Identification	.464**	.000	Significant
Brand Trust	.627**	.000	Significant
Perceived Quality	.378**	.000	Significant

Legend: Relationship is significant at p-value < 0.05

Data on table 4 reveals that the dimensions of restaurant experience are significantly correlated to the dimensions of brand equity in a positive direction. This indicates the rating of the respondents on restaurant experience increase; there is also a significant increase on the ratings on brand equity. The findings reveal a positive correlation between restaurant experience and brand equity. Consequently, these factors contribute to brand equity indicators, making it easier for customers to recognize, identify, trust, and comprehend the perceived quality of the restaurants. According to the study of Jeon and Yoo (2021), brand equity has a positive relationship to restaurant experience. Customers tend to identify a brand or form a strong link with it based on their sensory, intellectual, and behavioral experiences when dining, and they assess quality more favorably as a result. Furthermore, it was shown that the brand identity of restaurants is influenced by their experiences. The first factors include the quality of the meal together with the surroundings, the justice of the prices, the services provided, and lastly the reason for dining—the consumers. This could support the creation of marketing plans and improve restaurant brands' recognition (Ou et al., 2024; Putri, 2024).

Table 5

Relationship of Restaurant Experience to Brand Reputation

| Quality of Food	r	p-value	Interpretation
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.743**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.693**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.588**	.000	Significant
Quality of Service			
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.799**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.524**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.835**	.000	Significant
Quality of Physical Environment			
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.340**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.593**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.434**	.000	Significant

Legend: Relationship is significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 5 illustrates the connection between restaurant experience and brand reputation, presenting correlation values that signify a significant relationship between these two variables. Factors associated with restaurant experience, including the quality of food, service, and physical environment, play a crucial role in establishing emotional connections with customers. By prioritizing their needs and desires, businesses can create an appealing atmosphere and foster enduring relationships. This approach contributes to long-term success for the business. The outcome aligns with the findings of the previous research. Consumers' experiences serve as the foundation for the restaurant's trustworthiness. Consumers evaluate restaurants based on their cuisine and service quality. Building a positive view of a brand's reputation requires consistency and providing individualized customer service. Put simply, restaurants can anticipate client loyalty and a growth in their perceived positive reputation if they can provide high-quality dining experiences and reassure patrons that they can and will continue to provide the same level of service (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020; Rather et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2022).

Table 6

Relationship of Brand Equity to Brand Reputation

Brand Prestige	r	p-value	Interpretation
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.377**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.362**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.427**	.000	Significant
Brand Identification			
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.647**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.729**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.701**	.000	Significant
Brand Trust			
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.748**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.816**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.793**	.000	Significant
Perceived Quality			
Customer Centricity & Empathy	.777**	.000	Significant
Corporate Attractiveness	.692**	.000	Significant
Emotional Bond	.659**	.000	Significant

Legend: Relationship is significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 6 illustrates the correlation between brand equity and brand reputation, examining four dimensions: brand prestige, brand identification, brand trust, and perceived quality. The table reveals an overall positive correlation, signifying a significant relationship between these variables. Brand Identity emerges as a critical aspect, facilitating easy recall and recognition by customers. Brand prestige, emphasizing high-quality products and services, has a lasting impact. The dimensions of brand trust and loyalty, built over time, play crucial roles. Additionally, perceived quality highlights the aim to exceed customer expectations, contributing to satisfaction and business success. This leads to the establishment of an appealing business environment, the cultivation of emotional connections with customers, and a perception that they are at the forefront of all interactions, fostering genuine connections. The result of the study is consistent with the study of Ramzan and Ahmad (2018). Result shows that brand equity has significant relationship on brand reputation. It just means that restaurants must develop activities that customers will be attracted and delighted. Furthermore, restaurants must develop a brand that sets them apart from other similar types of restaurants. Additionally, advertising is more successful and builds brand equity when customers view a restaurant with strong brand reputation compared to rival brands (Fauzan, 2022, Weinmayer et al., 2023).

Fig... Brand Equity / Restaurant Experience / Brand Reputation framework ...n of
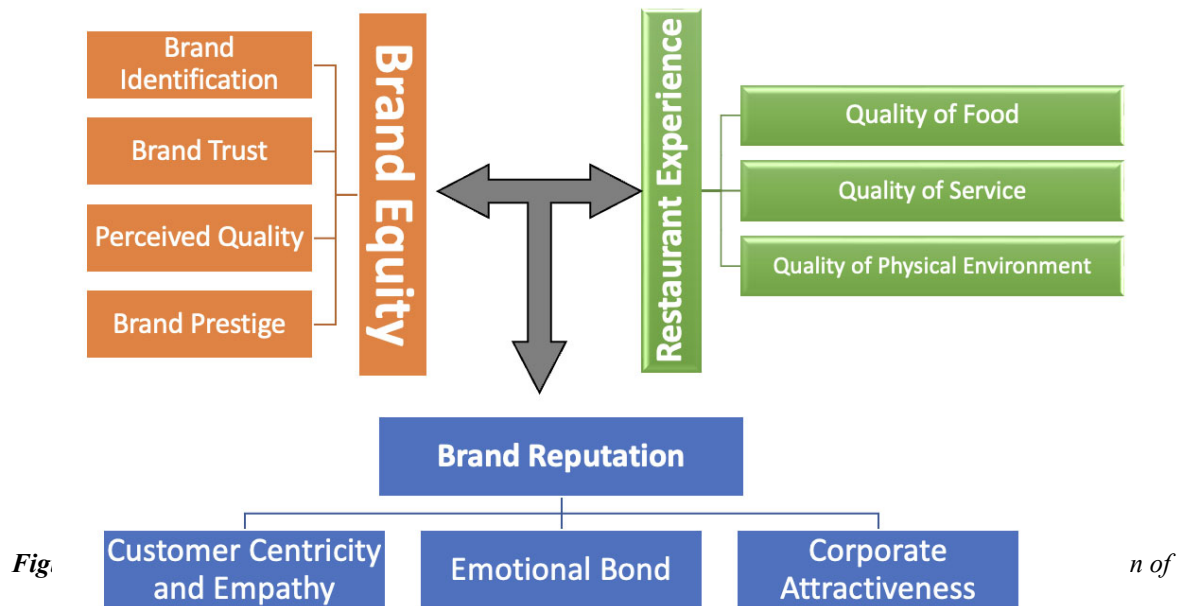
The framework is based on the result of the study on the correlation among the restaurant experience, brand equity and brand reputation of specialty restaurant. The findings reveal a robust and positive direct relationship among these three key factors. In simpler terms, a positive change in one, like an enhanced restaurant experience or strengthened brand equity, tends to correspond with a positive change into others, ultimately contributing to a favorable brand reputation for specialty restaurants. This underscores the interconnected nature of these elements in shaping the overall perception and success of a restaurant brand.

The presence of double arrows in the framework is a crucial element that signifies the interrelationship among restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation. This symbol implies a significant influence: as the restaurant experience and brand equity improve, the brand reputation is also expected to enhance, and vice versa. This mutual influence underscores the dynamic and interconnected nature of these variables. The double arrows highlight the interdependence and feedback loops among these three components. The framework suggests that a holistic approach is necessary for sustained success in the restaurant industry. A positive change or strategic improvement in any one area can set off a chain reaction, positively impacting the other two components. Conversely, neglecting one aspect may have adverse effects on the overall brand perception and customer satisfaction. Therefore, managing these aspects concurrently is crucial for creating a cohesive and positive brand image in the minds of consumers.

In relation to the restaurant experience, the emphasis on the quality of food as the most assessed aspect in the context of restaurant experience suggests that customers place significant importance on the taste, presentation, and overall appeal of the food. Following closely is the quality of service, highlighting the role of attentive and efficient service in shaping the overall dining experience. Notably, the least emphasis on the quality of physical environment suggests that, in this study, customers may prioritize the culinary and service aspects over the ambiance or décor. Furthermore, the strategic use of orange in this context is purposeful, as it is chosen to convey the meaning of a vibrant experience. This choice aligns with the idea that the essence of the restaurant experience is lively, energetic, and perhaps even stimulating (Özkul, et al. 2020). The color adds a visual layer to underscore the dynamic and engaging nature of the dining encounter, complementing the quantitative assessments outlined in the study framework. Establishing an engaging visual brand experience for customers can be crucial to the success of a restaurant business in today's competitive marketplace. As a result, the research by Farzin et al. (2023) emphasizes the value of experience in marketing and brand management and offers managers and other business professionals' valuable knowledge.

Regarding brand equity, the study highlights that brand identification holds significant importance, being highly assessed. This implies that customers place considerable value on being able to easily recognize and associate with a restaurant's brand. Following closely are brand trust and perceived quality, suggesting that consumers prioritize trustworthiness and perceived excellence in the products or services offered. Notably, the study positions brand prestige as the least emphasized factor in this context, indicating that, for this study, prestige may play a comparatively minor role in influencing brand equity (Teng & Chen, 2023). The choice of green to symbolize brand equity is noteworthy. Associating green with the "meaning of life," the study aims to convey the vital role that brand equity plays in sustaining the existence and success of a restaurant. This metaphorical use of color enhances the visual impact, emphasizing the lifeblood that brand equity represents for restaurants. It adds a layer of depth to the analysis, connecting the assessment of brand elements with the broader concept of a restaurant's vitality and endurance in a competitive market (Özkul, et al. 2020).

In the domain of brand reputation, the study underscores that customer centricity and empathy are the most highly ranked factors. This suggests that customers place significant value on a restaurant's ability to prioritize their needs and show empathy in their interactions. Following closely is the importance of building an emotional bond with customers, emphasizing the role of emotional connections in shaping brand reputation. Interestingly, the study positions corporate attractiveness as the least emphasized factor, indicating that, in this context, corporate appeal may have a relatively minor impact on overall brand reputation. The use of blue to symbolize brand reputation is purposeful, with the intention of emphasizing the values of honesty and integrity. This color choice aligns with the broader cultural associations of blue with trust and dependability. The linking blue with these qualities, the study emphasizes that an honest and integral reputation is crucial for a restaurant's standing in the eyes of consumers. The color adds a visual layer to the analysis, enhancing the understanding of how these reputation factors contribute to the overall perception of a restaurant (Özkul, et al. 2020).

The positive connection between restaurant experience and brand equity denotes that if the restaurant experience improves, such as better food quality, enhanced service, and an improved physical environment; it positively influences brand equity. Satisfied customers are more likely to identify with the brand, trust it, and perceive it as having higher quality. Conversely, if brand equity is strengthened through effective branding, customer trust, and perceived quality, it can contribute to an enhanced restaurant experience. Customers with positive perceptions of the brand may have higher expectations, leading the restaurant to strive for excellence in its offerings and service. Moreover, similar to the study of Han et al. (2021), their study explores the mediating effects of brand reputation on the relationship to brand equity and builds and tests the restaurant brand equity model. This study's findings corroborate the present study's findings that there is a significant relationship between brand equity and reputation.

A strong brand equity contributes positively to brand reputation. A brand that is well-recognized, trusted, and associated with high quality and prestige is likely to have a positive reputation in the eyes of customers and the broader public. On the flip side, a positive brand reputation can enhance brand equity. A brand with a good reputation for customer-centric practices, ethical behavior, and positive societal impact is likely to be trusted and esteemed, thereby strengthening its overall brand equity. Moreover, a positive brand reputation can positively influence the restaurant experience. Customers may be more forgiving of occasional service hiccups or minor issues if they have a strong positive perception of the brand's overall reputation. Simultaneously, an excellent restaurant experience can contribute to a positive brand reputation. Satisfied customers are more likely to share positive experiences, contributing to the brand's reputation through word of mouth, online reviews, and social media as supported by Barfi, et al (2019) who investigated the influence of brand equity on brand trust and its mediation to brand reputation and moderation of social media.

The framework has practical and managerial implications for the restaurant industry. Thus, this suggests that the greater the positive changes in both restaurant experience and brand equity, the more favorable the overall brand reputation becomes. This conceptualization positions restaurant experience and brand equity as predictors or drivers, indicating that improvements in these areas are likely to lead to a positive outcome in terms of brand

reputation. This insight is valuable for businesses, providing practical implications and suggesting that investments in enhancing the dining experience and building a strong brand identity can contribute significantly to a positive reputation in the eyes of consumers. In essence, the framework portrays a cyclical relationship, emphasizing the continuous feedback loop where positive changes in experience and equity contribute to an enhanced reputation, which, in turn, can further reinforce positive experiences and brand equity.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In the assessment of restaurant experience, the respondents appreciate the quality of food, followed by the quality of service, and quality of physical environment, it becomes evident that the overall food quality affects the customers decisions. This includes the appropriateness of food temperatures, and adherence to standard portion sizes. The customers ensure food safety and serving at the right temperature guarantee the freshness of the food being served. Moreover, serving food in standard portion size promotes nutritional balance, reduces food waste, ensures cost-effectiveness, and maintains consistency in dining experience. With regards to the evaluation of brand equity, based on the result, brand identification was the most assessed by the respondents, next was brand trust, followed by perceived quality, and lastly brand prestige. Therefore, this association shapes customer's perceptions and influences their dining decisions. When customers associate a restaurant with positive qualities, they are more likely to return, recommend it to others, and become loyal patrons. Through the evaluation of brand reputation, most assessed customer centricity and empathy as the highest, followed by emotional bond, and lastly corporate attractiveness. One can ascertain the credibility and trustworthiness of a restaurant. Customers form their overall perceptions and opinions about a specific establishment based on indicators like the importance given to customers by restaurant employees, the provision of honest and accurate information, this implies that honesty fosters trust, builds loyalty, and enhances the overall dining experience. Trust and credibility are developed when they see that restaurants are transparent and upfront, which instills a sense of confidence and reassurance. There is a significant relationship between restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation. Moreover, the three indicators are highly connected to some aspects of specialty restaurants specifically quality of food, brand identification and customer centricity and empathy. The strong direct correlation of restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation complements each other leading to have a strong foundation of specialty restaurants to sustain in the food and service industry. The researcher proposed a branding framework for restaurant experience, brand equity, and brand reputation among specialty restaurants in CALABARZON Region.

Specialty restaurants may create healthy option menus for elderly and health-conscious customers but will not compromise the authenticity of the dish. They may also launch group meals for family, friends, and students at a reasonable and affordable price. The specialty restaurant management may consider providing more comfortable and enough space to customers, prioritizing a conducive ambience for guests. Through this, customers could create memorable dining experience. Specialty restaurants may utilize influencers and famous celebrities by engaging and promoting their business. This could create a positive collaboration that may increase the brand equity by focusing on brand prestige. The restaurants may host an important event in the community that will retain customers and attract new ones. Furthermore, specialty restaurants must choose an influencer or celebrity who has the same values and have a similarity on the restaurant being endorsed. The specialty restaurant management may create attractive symbols and logos that will represent the kind, theme, and identity of the restaurant. These symbols could help recall positive feelings that will associate with the brand, it will also add to the brand foundation and supplement on the delivering of high-quality products and services. The Department of Tourism and the Department of Trade and Industry may organize an accrediting body to assess the quality and performance specifically for specialty restaurants. Furthermore, Future researchers may conduct a similar study that is not part of the study like restaurant marketing, sales and, societal trends in the specialty restaurants.

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