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UNDERSTANDING KEY DETERMINANTS OF BRAND LOYALTY IN FULL SERVICE RESTAURANTS IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the key determinants of brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda. The study used a quantitative research approach and adopted a cross sectional correlation survey design to test the study hypotheses. A total of 348 completed questionnaires collected from 116 restaurants were used in the analysis. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to propose a model that examines the key determinants of brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda. The findings from the study revealed that dining experience and restaurant image were significant predictors of brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda and customer satisfaction was not a significant predictor of guest loyalty. Despite its managerial implications, several limitations of the study call for further empirical enquiry.

INTRODUCTION

Restaurant trade is expanding rapidly worldwide and it is expected to have an investment of almost $992 billion and a volume of over 586 billion transactions in 2014, presenting more than 18% growth in five years (Reportlinker, 2013). In Uganda, restaurants from other African countries

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and the rest of the world have emerged along with the indigenous ones (Tripadvisor, 2013*)*. The increased number of restaurants has fostered heightened competition among food and beverage service operations in the country. Competition has had major implications for the customer, providing: increased choice; greater demand for value for money and augmented levels of service. Furthermore, various consumer-centered parameters, such as changes in their lifestyles, economic status, awareness, and rising disposable income are impacting heavily the marketing of restaurant services (International Markets Bureau, 2011). Additionally, there is little to distinguish one restaurant's offerings from another. Indeed some studies have found that many hospitality establishments in Uganda including restaurants easily lose customers to competitors (Tukamushaba, Musinguzi, Katongle, & Honggen, 2012). Tukamushaba et al.'s (2012) findings showed that these restaurants are rated poorly by customers and perhaps this can also explain the rampant restaurant failures.

It has become inevitable for restaurants to seek competitive advantage. One approach to gaining a competitive edge is to understand how to attract and retain customers. Indeed, the most frequently mentioned outcome of the marketing process is a loyal customer, with many authors of marketing investigating this important marketing concept (e.g. Baumann, Elliott, & Burton., 2012; Clark & Wood, 1999; Ha & Jang, 2012; Jones & Taylor, 2007; Oliver, 1999; Oliver, 1997; Ryu, Lee, & Kim., 2012; Uncles, Dowling, & Hammond, 2003). However, loyalty has remained as a paradox (see Jones & Taylor, 2007; Ogba & Tan, 2009; Soderlund, 2006; Uncles et al., 2003). According to Uncles et al. (2003), at a most general level, loyalty is devotion, commitment or addiction that consumers may exhibit to brands, services, stores, firms (e.g. restaurants), organizations, product categories (e.g. coffee) and activities (e.g. bird watching). This has led to varied conceptualizations and subsequently myriad forms of loyalty such as brand loyalty (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012), service loyalty (Bove & Johnson, 2009; Jones & Taylor, 2007) and customer loyalty among others.

Drawing from extant literature, a plethora of scholars have examined loyalty in services using customer as a unit of analysis. However, little work appears to be done on brand loyalty. In particular, research examining the key determinants of brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda is still sparse and at best subjective. Therefore the main objective of this study is to investigate the major factors that stimulate brand loyalty in the context of full service restaurants with the

belief that in doing so, it will be possible to clarify issues of relevance to practitioners in Uganda.

The study measures brand loyalty using behavioural, attitudinal and cognitive dimensions (Bloemer, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 1999; de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1998; Jones & Taylor, 2007; Oliver, 1999). It is assumed here that "restaurant brand loyalty" means that a customer revisits the same restaurant whenever possible and recommends to others or maintains a positive attitude towards the restaurant brand. This article forms a firm expression of the authors' interest in the area of brand loyalty in restaurant trade and examines the key factors that engender such loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a critical review of relevant literature on the relationships between dining experience, customer satisfaction, perceived restaurant image, and brand loyalty in the restaurant industry. We examine various ideas that support, evaluate and critique the cumulative knowledge growth on the key determinants of brand loyalty in restaurant business. We then stated our hypotheses based on reviewed literature.

Loyalty prerequisites

Researchers and practitioners have not yet identified a theoretical framework, specifying factors that could lead to the development of restaurant brand loyalty. However, there appears to be consensus that customer satisfaction and service quality are prerequisites of loyalty (Ha & Im, 2012; Ha & Jang, 2012; Pollack, 2009; Soriano, 2002). These technical, economical, and psychological factors that influence customers to switch service providers are considered to be additional prerequisites of loyalty (Selnes, 1993). Recent studies also indicate that the firm's image may influence customer enthusiasm: value, delight, and loyalty (Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Ogba & Tan, 2009). Other studies have also shown that previous dining experience may influence interest with a particular food outlet (Ryu et al., 2012). This network of causal factors (image, satisfaction, and dining experience) forms the main focus of the study.

Dining experience and brand loyalty

This sub-section is discussed under two major themes: previous dining experience and dimensions of dining experience.

Previous dining experience. An experience is a situation where a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider (Chan & Lam, 2009). The previous dining experience has been found to be significantly associated with brand loyalty. It is also suggested that whether a guest will revisit a restaurant or talk nicely about it depends on the first impression with the restaurant (Chan & Lam, 2009; Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011). Indeed, many scholars in service marketing advocate that previous customer's experience with the restaurant determines future behaviour (Ha & Im, 2012; Ha & Jang, 2012; Pollack, 2009; Prentice, 2013; Ramanathan, 2012; Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2011) and attitude (Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011). For example, Oliver (1997) argues that previous service experience, an aspect of dining experience, plays a role in influencing loyalty.

Dimensions of dining experience. Extant literature reveals that customers in the restaurant sector use various dining experience attributes such as food, physical restaurant environment, and service in evaluating restaurant choice (see Chow, Lau, Lo, Sha, & Yun, 2007; Namkung & Jang, 2008). In addition, Soriano (2002) found that food quality, service quality, value of the meal and the atmosphere are significant reasons for customers to return to a restaurant.

Pollack (2009) found that interaction quality; physical environment quality, waiting time and valence have significant effect on positive word of mouth and repeat purchase intention in salon and telecommunication services. It is also mentioned that tangible restaurant attributes like ambience, design and decor do not only give customers cue on the quality of experience but also influence their future behaviours (Ha & Im, 2012; Ha & Jang, 2012). Other scholars like Butcher (2005), say that social factors such as customer-employee interaction and the behaviour of other customers are crucial for building repeat purchases, especially in full service restaurant settings. Empirical work of Ha and Jang (2012) indicated that restaurant colour, design and music predict customer attitude and behaviour towards a restaurant. Similarly, Ryu et al. (2012) found that food, service and atmospheric experience have positive impact on customer behavioural intentions. It appears from the above literature

that dining experience is positively associated with restaurant brand loyalty manifestations.

Relationship between image and brand loyalty

According to Keller (1993), the image of a brand is customers' perceptions of the brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumers' memory. Many writers, for example, Souiden, Kassim, and Hong (2006) describe corporate image as the overall impression in minds of the public about a firm. A firm's image is an important factor that positively or negatively influences marketing activity. Image is considered to influence customers' minds as a result of combined effect of physical evidence, word of mouth and their actual experiences with the goods and services (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998).

Customer experience with the restaurant refers to the customer's interaction with the food outlet, and restaurant identity and image emerges from this interaction (see Saraniemi, 2011). Image is believed to have the capacity to influence customers' perception of the goods and services offered (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). The perceived image consists of both facts and belief about a firm (Keaveney & Hunt, 1992). Therefore image is a mental picture of the restaurant attributes as well as the symbolic meaning associated with the restaurant such as social class and social contribution in the community (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Heung, Mok, and Kwan (1996) confirmed hotel image to be an important factor and found it to maintain a relatively high score rating among loyal customers. Mazanec (1995) found image to be positively associated with customer satisfaction and customer preference (a construct of loyalty) in luxury hotels. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) identified that the hotel image and customer satisfaction have direct impact through the performance of housekeeping, reception, food and beverage and are positively correlated to customer loyalty. According to Christensen and Askegaard (2001), and Kandampully and Hu (2007), restaurant's image forms a reference for choosing where to dine among customers. Positive perception reduces the perceived risk in the choice of restaurant, thus increasing the restaurant's acceptability in the market (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Kim, Jean, & Hyun, 2012). Some guests use the outstanding restaurants to identify and communicate their self-image (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Thus, some customers continue patronizing those eateries that meet and identify with their status in society.

Wood (2000) argues that brand image is always tailored to the needs and wants of a target market so as to facilitate brand loyalty. Hsieh & Li (2008) showed that consumers' perception of an organization's public relations practice is an antecedent of loyalty. They further found that the impact of public relations perception on brand loyalty is stronger and more significant when the brand image is favourable. In their detailed behavioural analyses, Ogba and Tan (2009) showed brand image to have positive impact on customer expression of loyalty and commitment to market offerings. Alves and Raposo (2010) in their model using structural equation confirmed that university image influences loyalty towards the institution among students. However, some scholars (e.g. Ball, Coelho, & Vilares, 2006) critique the assertion that image affects brand loyalty, arguing that the significance of the effect is amplified through satisfaction and trust. In addition, there is also a caution that the impact of image on consumer loyalty depends on culture context (Souiden et al., 2006). Nevertheless, numerous empirical findings have indicated that perceived image of a firm positively influences loyalty (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Kim et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2012).

Satisfaction and brand loyalty

From the traditional perspective, customer satisfaction is an evaluative process in which expected service is compared with actual service (Oliver, 1997). However, more recent scholars view customer satisfaction as a function of both cognitive responses in the evaluative process and emotional responses to the service (Im & Ha, 2011; Shemwell, Yavas, & Bilgin, 1998). This paradigm shift supports the assertion that guests do not necessarily seek economic value maximization alone in choosing a restaurant but also to meet their social needs (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004). Noteworthy, how significant the cognitive or emotional responses are in customer satisfaction depends on the service context (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004), purpose of visit (Soriano, 2002) and kind of customer (Clark & Wood, 1999). Kandampully and Hu (2007) emphasize that in the hospitality industry, how the service is delivered induces more emotional responses than what is delivered.

Extant literature suggests that customer satisfaction precedes loyalty (Santouridis & Trivellas, 2010; Sorinao, 2002; Oliver, 1999). According to this view, high level of guest satisfaction leads to positive word-of-mouth and restaurant revisit. Similarly Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece (1999) found that customer satisfaction leads to repeat patronage.

However, some scholars critique this claim, arguing that the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is not linear (Baumann et al., 2012; Oliver, 1999; Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004). It is said that other factors, such as perceived switching cost and trust moderate the relationship between the constructs (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). The relationship is further complicated by observations that some dissatisfied customers stay with the same service provider (Yanamandram & White, 2006) and satisfied guests often switch service providers (Ball et al., 2006; Curasi & Kennedy, 2002). Some research shows that customer satisfaction precedes true loyalty but it does not guarantee repeat purchase (Berezina, Cobanoglu, Miller, & Kwansa, 2012; Mc Dougall & Levesque, 2000; Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Sorinao, 2002). Some scholars argue that there are several factors that can disrupt the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, for example perceived switching costs or risk, level of customer involvement in service delivery and customer characteristics such as demographics and urge to seek variety or new experience (see Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004). This debate on the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is even mixed up in empirical works. For example, Baumann et al. (2012), Ryu et al (2012), and Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) found that customer satisfaction has significant effect on customer loyalty while Jani and Han (2011) findings shows no significant effect of customer satisfaction on customer commitment but the effect is amplified by trust. The above literature review presupposes that there is still confusion in the relationship between guest satisfaction and restaurant brand loyalty. The two extremes to date have generated a kind of inconclusive debate and there is need for a "cease fire".

The proposed model

For the purpose of this study, thus, it is needed to examine the relationship between brand loyalty and the three prerequisites; image, satisfaction and dining experience in the restaurant trade. Drawing from these relationships, a model in Figure 1 is proposed. This model predicts that restaurant image, customer satisfaction and dining experience directly influence brand loyalty.
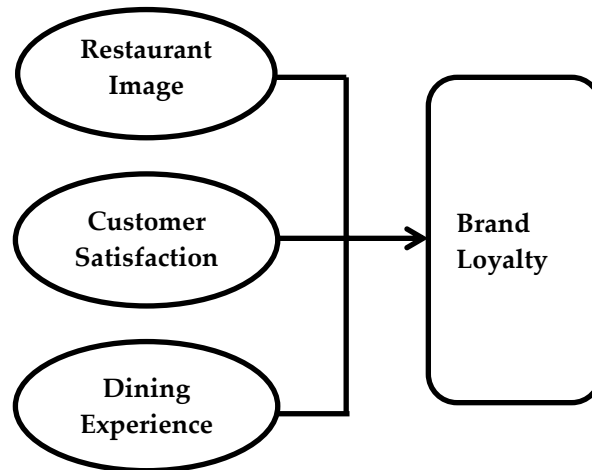
Figure 1. *The model of relationships between restaurant image, customer satisfaction, dining experience and brand loyalty*

We therefore hypothesize that;

H1: Dining experience positively affects brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda.

H2: Perceived restaurant image positively affects brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda.

H3: Customer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda.

H4: The combination of dining experience, perceived restaurant image and customer satisfaction significantly predicts brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda.

This study focuses on full service restaurants because we consider brand loyalty as a salient aspect in formal, full service restaurants than for informal restaurants although the latter dominate Uganda's restaurant industry. The next section presents the approaches and methods used in the study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional correlation survey design to test the study hypotheses. Burns and Grove (2009) argue that non-experimental research designs, such as, descriptive and correlational designs, should be

utilized in research where phenomena are studied in their natural environment without any manipulation of the variables. Brink (2006) observes that the purpose of non-experimental research is to describe phenomena, and to examine and describe relationships among the variables.

A population of 164 full service restaurants highly rated by travellers was used (www.tripadvisor.com). Given the small number of objects, the survey was based on a census. The unit of analysis was a full service restaurant; the individual guest formed the unit of enquiry. According to Spears and Gregoire (2006), at a full service restaurant a guest is welcomed, seated at the table, served and afterwards the bill is paid; the service style is waiter-table service. The restaurant was chosen as the unit of analysis following the guidelines by Berry (2000), who argues that for tangible goods, the product is the primary brand but for services, the company is the brand. The study therefore presupposes that it is possible to have brand loyalty for individual service companies such as restaurants. A maximum of five customers were targeted per restaurant but the number of respondents who filled the questionnaire adequately from each restaurant ranged three to five. To address variations in the number of responses per restaurant, a minimum of three respondents was considered for further analysis. The decision to accept three respondents per restaurant was based on earlier studies such as Baer and Freese (2003) and Ngoma (2009) who also used a minimum of three respondents per firm. Respondents were systemically selected; specifically, every first guest on tables with odd numbers, beginning with table No.1 was selected to complete the questionnaire. From a population of 164 restaurants, usable questionnaire copies from 116 restaurants were returned implying a response rate of 70.7 percent. In order to obtain a representative response per restaurant, data were aggregated using SPSS version 19. This software allows a new data file containing only the aggregated data to be created, in this case using restaurant name as the break variable.

Measurement of the variables and questionnaire development

The questionnaire had two parts. Part I for the profile of the sample restaurants was filled by restaurant owners-managers and part II for the main study variables was answered by the individual respondents who were restaurant guests. The study variables were operationalized basing on the previous studies and literature review. All the measurement items for *brand loyalty* were adopted from Jones and Taylor (2007) who used

behavioural, attitudinal and cognitive loyalty dimensions. The measurement items for brand loyalty were anchored on a five point-Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Such items included for example "I will recommend this restaurant to someone who seeks my advice", "Whenever I will need to eat out I will be coming to this restaurant", "I am likely to pay a little more for the services at this restaurant". The same dimensions had previously been used by Soderlund (2006) and Oliver (1999).

Dining experience was sub-divided into six components: dining, service, atmospheric, interpersonal, price and pre-arrival experiences. Six measurement items for food experience, four for service experience and four for atmospheric experiences were respectively adopted from Ryu et al. (2012). One additional item was developed for service experience and atmospheric experience. Interpersonal interaction experience was captured by five scale items borrowed from Lloyd and Luk (2011) and two items developed to tap interaction with other guests. Price experience was measured by three items adopted from Ryu et al. (2012) and Jani and Han (2011). Such items included "The background music was soft and pleasing", "The service personnel showed passion for their job", "The food at this restaurant was delicious", "There was a good range of prices for any guest to afford". All the items on dining experience were anchored on a five point-Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Perceived restaurant image was measured using item scales adopted from Turkyilmaz and Ozkan (2007), which had also been used by Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) and Ball et al. (2006). The measurement items were anchored on a five point scale ranging from 1=very untrue to 5=very true. Sample items include expressions like "It is prestigious to dine at this restaurant", "This restaurant has good reputation".

Customer satisfaction was captured by five items adopted from Hume and Mort (2010), previously used by Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003), and one from Jani and Han (2011). Some items captured evaluative satisfaction, while others captured affective satisfaction. Sample items include "Overall, I am happy with the dining experience at this restaurant" and "This restaurant's services met my expectations". The responses were measured on a five point-Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Data management and analysis

Data was processed using SPSS. Entry errors and missing values were detected using frequencies. A missing completely at random (MCAR) test was not significant (P>0.5), indicating that the missing values were not by intention. Linear interpolation method was used to impute the missing values. We also tested for common methods bias. Consistent with Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012), Hamman's one factor test was carried out with the first factor accounting for 10.69% meaning that it did not explain more than 50% of the variance. This implies that our data was statistically devoid of problems of common methods bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Reliability for all the variables under study was tested using Cronbach alpha guidelines and was well above the cut off point of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Reliability of the measurement scales*

Variable	Number of items	Alpha value
Dining experience	30	0.94
Perceived restaurant image	9	0.93
Guest satisfaction	5	0.90
Guest loyalty	14	0.91

Content validity of the measurement items was examined by a panel of experts from the particular knowledge fields from which the constructs are borrowed. The panel consisted of one restaurant manager, two food and beverage service lecturers and one service marketing lecturer. The content validity index of all the variables was above 70% as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Content validity of the measurement scales*

Variable	Original number of items	Number of items retained	CVI*
Dining experience	34	30	88
Perceived restaurant image	11	9	82
Guest satisfaction	6	5	83
Guest loyalty	21	15	71

Source: Peer reviews by experts identified by the researchers; *Content validity index

Factor analysis was performed to identify the patterns in data and to compress data to a controllable level (Field, 2005; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Using principal component analysis, only those factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 were retained (Guttman-Kaiser rule). The Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's (1954) test of sampling adequacy was computed to ensure that factor analysis yielded distinct and reliable factors (Kaiser, 1974). The following criteria were used to assess sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1974): 0.90=Marvelous; 0.80=Meritorious; 0.70=Middling; 0.60=Mediocre; 0.50=Miserable and below 0.50, unacceptable. The KMO for these study variables ranged between 0.83 and 0.93 implying that they were oscillating between meritorious and marvellous. Besides, only items with communalities of 0.60 and above were retained. All the variables had determinants of matrix above 0.00001 and this suggested there was no multi-collinearity problem (Field, 2005) or singularity between variables (Kulcsár, 2010).

From the exploratory factor analysis dining experience yielded six factors: food experience, service experience, interpersonal interaction experience, atmospheric experience, price experience and pre-arrival experience, which accounted for 65.22% of the variance (Appendix 1). Perceived restaurant image had two underlying factors and these were interpreted as emotional image and functional image, explaining 72.84% of the variance in restaurant image (Appendix 2). Guest satisfaction was found to be a two dimensional construct, consisting of evaluative and effective factors, which account for 79.78% of the variance in guest satisfaction (Appendix 3). Lastly, brand loyalty had four underlying factors, accounting for 71.66% of its variance (Appendix 4). The first factor was attitudinal loyalty which consisted of mainly advocacy and altruism. The second was cognitive loyalty that manifests through customer's willingness to pay more for the restaurant services. Behavioural loyalty was the third component, consisting of exclusive consideration. The fourth dimension was another kind of cognitive loyalty comprised of insensitivity to price rise. In this study, factor analysis split cognitive loyalty into two sub-dimensions: customer's willingness to pay more and price rise insensitivity, suggesting that brand loyalty consists of four dimensions. It may be proper to appreciate that majority of studies in marketing present loyalty as a multi-dimensional construct. However, there is no agreement between scholars on its exact dimensionality, and at most measurement of the dimensions has been inconsistent (Jones & Taylor, 2007). For example, Soderlund (2006) highlighted that a researcher who wishes to capture loyalty in an empirical study is faced with

important decisions regarding which particular loyalty dimensions to include and how to deal with their interrelatedness.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of restaurants showed that 63% of the sample restaurants had at least a branch, while 37% did not have any branch. Majority of the restaurants has been operating for a period of 5 to 10 years (43%), followed by less than 5 years (18%) and 11 to 16 years (18%), and above 22 years of existence (10%). In terms of cuisine, many restaurants were serving continental or international food (57%), followed by a mixture of both local and international food (37%) and local food (6%) which to imply that international dishes are more popular than local dishes in full service restaurants in Kampala (Table 3; see Appendix 5 for respondents' profile).

Table 3. *Sample characteristics (N=116)*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Branch affiliation		
Restaurant with branch network	73	62.9
Restaurant without branch network	43	37.1
Number of years of existence		
Less than 5 years	21	18.1
From 5 to 10 years	49	42.3
From 11 to 16 years	21	18.1
From 17 to 22 years	12	10.3
Above 22 years	13	11.2
Cuisine type		
Local	7	6.0
Continental	66	56.9
Mixed (both local and continental)	43	37.1

The results in Table 4 reveal that the corresponding average responses for the constructs were; dining experience (Mean=3.41, SD=0.63), perceived restaurant image (Mean=3.42, SD=0.66), guest satisfaction (Mean=3.47, SD=0.73) and brand loyalty (Mean=3.27, SD=0.54). The mean scores for the study constructs ranged between 3.27 and 3.47 and the standard deviations ranged from 0.54 to 0.73. Since the standard

deviations were small compared to the mean scores, this suggests that the computed averages represent the observed data. In other words, the calculated means are a good replica of the real population (Field, 2006).

Table 4. *Means, standard deviation and zero order correlations*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Dining experience	3.41	0.63	(0.94)			
2.Perceived t image	3.42	0.66	0.76*	(0.93)		
3.Guest satisfaction	3.47	0.73	0.76*	0.73*	(0.90)	
4. Brand loyalty	3.27	0.54	0.70*	0.66*	0.65*	(0.91)

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The figures in parentheses indicate reliabilities of the measurement scales

To establish the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables in the study, Pearson zero order correlation was carried out. The correlation was zero order because the effect of other variables in the correlation between any two variables was not controlled. The correlation results suggest that brand loyalty has a positive relationship with dining experience (r=0.70, p<0.01), perceived restaurant image (r=0.66, p<0.01) and guest satisfaction (r=0.65, p<0.01) (Table 4).

Regression analysis

To test the specified model, regression analyses were performed to evaluate the effect of each independent variable on brand loyalty and second, the combined effect of the three independent variables on the criterion variable (Table 5). In the initial model (Model 1), control variables namely; number of years of existence and cuisine type were entered and found to be non-significant predictors of brand loyalty. In model 2, dining experience was introduced and the results in Table 5 indicate that it is a significant predictor of brand loyalty (β=0.71, R^2=0.50, p<0.01) accounting for 50% of the variance hence lending support for H1. This means that when dining experience improves by one unit or one standard deviation, brand loyalty increases by 0.71. Additionally, the introduction of perceived restaurant image (in model 3) increased the predictive power of the two variables (dining experience and restaurant image) to 53% (β=0.30, R^2=0.53, p<0.01); lending support for H2. This implies that when perceived restaurant image improves by one unit or one standard deviation, brand

loyalty is boosted by 0.30. However, while the introduction of guest satisfaction (in model 4) increased the total predictive power of the predictor variables to 55%, the change was not significant (β=0.20, R^2=0.55, p>0.05) meaning that H3 was rejected. In general, the three variables accounted for 55% of the variance in brand loyalty (R^2=0.55, p<0.001) hence supporting H4. The overall model was statistically significant at 1%.

Table 5. *Hierarchical regression results*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Collinearity tests Tolerance	VIF
Constant	3.26**	1.30**	1.11**	1.10**		
Number of years of existence	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.98	1.03
Cuisine type	-0.01	-0.05	-0.04	-0.05	0.97	1.03
Dining experience		0.71**	0.48**	0.38**	0.33	2.99
Perceived restaurant image			0.30**	0.23*	0.36	2.76
Guest satisfaction				0.20	0.37	2.73
R squared	0.00	0.50	0.53	0.55	na	na
Adjusted R squared	-0.02	0.48	0.52	0.53	na	na
R squared change	-	0.50	0.03	0.02	na	na
df	103	102	101	100	na	na
F	0.37	33.44	28.95	24.31	na	na
Significance	0.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	na	na

Dependent variable: Brand loyalty

* Significant at 0.05 level; ** Significant at 0.01 level

DISCUSSION

In H1, the study sought to test whether dining experience has a significant effect on brand loyalty. Indeed the results supported this view since dining experience was found to be a significant predictor of brand loyalty. From this study we can rightly argue that dining experience is an influential factor of brand loyalty. The results mirror Ha and Jang's (2012) results that restaurant atmosphere has positive effect on brand loyalty. Also the finding concurs with Ryu et al.'s (2012) results that restaurant atmosphere, food and service have a positive impact on customer revisit and recommendation. The study demonstrates that guests who are served good food in a restaurant are likely to be loyal to such a restaurant. When the guests find that the restaurant serves a variety of delicious and nutritious food, then they are likely to visit that restaurant again. When guests get good dining experience they do not only share such experience

with others but also do advise them to try the same restaurant. Customers take and recommend friends to dining places that they are sure of getting good experience. Not every food service outlet has good food and service. So to avoid disappointment and embarrassment, customers are more willing to use a familiar restaurant than a new eatery.

This study also confirms the assertion that guests who get friendly interpersonal interaction with restaurant staff in form of patience, comfort, politeness, cheerfulness and passion to serve are more likely to revisit such a restaurant or go to its associated branches with similar service standards (see Pollack, 2009; Butcher, 2005). This study therefore reaffirms that good interactions between a customer and restaurant staff such as chefs, managers and waiters build into personal relationship, creating a bond between the restaurant and customers. The findings further indicate that if the relationship between restaurant patrons is positive, then return visits are likely. Indeed, these study findings suggest that some customers may keep patronizing particular food and beverage service outlets simply because of the relationship created with the service staff and other guests.

The study further demonstrates that for guests to positively talk about a restaurant to other people or recommend other people to dine with the restaurant, they must have enjoyed the restaurant atmosphere involving interior design and colour, soft and pleasing music, clean and safe environment, and neat and well dressed staff. This renders support for the findings by Ha and Jang (2012) and Ryu et al. (2012) who found that restaurant atmospherics predict customer future behaviour. The study findings also revealed that pre-arrival experience in form of accessibility to restaurant and convenience at entrance influences the guests' decision to visit the restaurant again. This suggests that guests are more likely to revisit a restaurant if the journey to the establishment and the first impression (convenience and reception) are friendly.

H2 sought to establish whether perceived restaurant image is related to brand loyalty. This study found restaurant image to be a significant predictor of brand loyalty, meaning that the intention of the guest to visit the restaurant for a second time is dependent on the perceptions developed about the restaurant. Restaurants with professional staff, a good source of image, induce guests to visit them again. This study demonstrates that for guests to develop a positive attitude about a restaurant they must be served better than other restaurants and better than what they perceive. The study findings seem to suggest that guests find no problem with paying a little more for services at a restaurant with

good image. Reliable and well reputed restaurants persuade the guest to always come back to that restaurant whenever such guest needs to eat out. Stating that the guest's perception about a restaurant determines his/her future behaviour and attitude towards such food outlets, the study findings are generally in agreement with previous works (e.g. Alves & Raposo, 2010; Hsieh & Li, 2008; Ogba &Tan, 2009)

H3 sought to establish whether customer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda. Surprisingly, the model showed that guest satisfaction is not a significant predictor of brand loyalty. These findings contradict with a number of studies which have found customer satisfaction to have a significant effect on customer loyalty (e.g. Baumann et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the results support the argument that customer satisfaction is necessary for repurchase behaviour but it is not obvious that a satisfied guest always comes back (Berezina et al., 2012, Oliver, 1997). Furthermore, these findings are consistent with other empirical works (e.g. Baumann et al, 2012; Oliver, 1999; Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004) which found that satisfied guests may not necessarily come back; instead there are instances where dissatisfied guests return because of other reasons such as perceived switching cost. In fact some studies have concluded that while customer satisfaction precedes true loyalty, it does not guarantee repeat purchase (see Berezina et al., 2012; Mc Dougall & Levesque, 2000; Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Sorinao, 2002). The findings also concur with Jani and Han's (2011) empirical results that customer satisfaction does not have a direct effect on customer commitment; instead the effect is mediated by the trust that a customer has in the restaurant. Probably, this is the cause of the surprising results in this study, since trust tends to develop slowly as a result of factors such as dining experience and restaurant image.

H4 sought to establish whether the combination of dining experience, perceived restaurant image and guest satisfaction is significant predictor of brand loyalty in full service restaurants in Uganda. The hierarchical multiple regression results (see table 5) indicate that dining experience and restaurant image are significant predictors of brand loyalty except guest satisfaction. This finding confirms Ha and Jang's (2012) findings that restaurant attributes, such as food, service and atmosphere predict customer loyalty. Similarly, the study supports Kandampully and Hu's (2007) and Ogba and Tan's (2009) findings. Lastly and most importantly, this study shows that dining experience has more influence on guest loyalty than perceived restaurant image since much of the variance in guest loyalty was explained by dining experience.

CONCLUSION

In order to determine the possible required changes to improve guest loyalty in full-service restaurants in Uganda, it was necessary to explore the forces that drive guest behaviour and the consequent outcomes such as intention to visit again or refer another guest to a particular restaurant. The following conclusions are drawn from the study findings and discussion. The results suggest a positive and significant relationship between dining experience, guest satisfaction, and restaurant image with brand loyalty. The results also reveal that dining experience and restaurant image are major predictors of brand loyalty in full-service restaurants in Uganda. However, dining experience was found to be the most important determinant of brand loyalty in these restaurants. Generally, these results are important because they provide evidence of the aggregate explanatory power of dining experience and restaurant image on the criterion variable. The findings discussed on the association between dining experience, restaurant image and brand loyalty lead to the conclusion that restaurant brand loyalty can be enhanced through appropriate dining experiences such as food quality experience, service experience, atmospheric experience, and restaurant image. Therefore, dining experience and restaurant image act as an impetus for loyalty in full-service restaurants in Uganda. Accordingly, the learning point is that dining experience and restaurant image are very fundamental in influencing guest loyalty in this sub-sector of the restaurant trade in Uganda.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study provides an alternative theoretical position for investigating brand loyalty that is, building loyalty from the perspective of the dining experience and restaurant image in full service restaurants in Uganda. The study lays emphasis on the role of dining experience and restaurant image as key predictors of brand loyalty. Additionally, the study confirms previous theoretical views that restaurant brand loyalty is associated with perceived image. However, the study disagrees with some scholars who contend that customer satisfaction directly leads to repeat purchase but agrees with the proponents of the view that probably other factors moderate or mediate this relationship, depending on the service context. Thus, more research on the effect of customer satisfaction on loyalty is needed to cross-validate the findings under different settings and/or introducing other factors as moderators and mediators. From a

methodological standpoint, future dining experience studies should benefit from developing a more robust measurement incorporating the six dining experience components that exist in full-service restaurants.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

As verified in this study and previous studies, the significant influence of dining experience and perceived restaurant image on brand loyalty implies that restaurateurs in Kampala should direct their attention to the manner in which dining experience is offered, and the way their restaurants' brands are perceived in the market. Since restaurants sell experiences, there may be no doubt that the dining experience has, and will continue to have a substantial influence on brand loyalty. Considering the demands of a more informed guest, seeking quality and novelty, restaurants should provide excellent dining experience above guests' standards in an attempt to create re-patronage and advocacy among customers. This therefore sheds light on ways of offering good dining experience through good food, service, friendly staff-guest relations, physical environment, price, easy access to service and pre-arrival incidents. Managers need to emphasize other aspects that enhance guest satisfaction on top of dining experience and restaurant image.

The food should not only be delicious but also nutritious with variety, presented in an appealing style to the eye. The service staff needs to be fast, knowledgeable, courteous and interactive in the service encounter and therefore identifying critical service attributes among candidates and developing them is vital in restaurant service. Due to the hedonic nature of restaurant dining experience, an attractive interior design, spatial seating arrangement, cleanliness, light and soft music should be given further attention in the construction of the restaurant facility since this seems to be lacking in most food service outlets in Uganda. Also restaurant managers need to ensure that the facility is accessible for customers with different means of transport. Besides, accessibility of the outlook of the face, entrance and reception design should not be left out when considering restaurant loyalty enhancement. The first impression matters in what is next; order a meal or not, to come back or not and recommend or not. Generally, pre-arrival experience needs to be enhanced.

Dining experience is an important marketing tool for inducing brand loyalty which translates into revisits and advocacy. Furthermore,

the restaurant service attributes can be potential determinants of the restaurant image which does not only influence customer attraction but also retention and advocacy. Dining experience and perceived restaurant image are intricately related and have direct influence on each other. Therefore restaurant operations like production, service, human resource and marketing should be coordinated in managing guest loyalty through dining experience and perceived restaurant image.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its managerial implications, several limitations of the study call for further empirical enquiry. Methodologically, the data were collected in Uganda, a setting that does not reflect restaurant guests' behaviour in a different cultural milieu. The sampling of metropolitan restaurants in Kampala only might have a limitation against generalization as these restaurants might have differed from the entire population of full-service restaurants in Uganda. Responses were got from participants found at the restaurant at the time the data were collected and these respondents might have been visiting the respective restaurant for the first time. Moreover, data were collected from full-service restaurants, excluding other kinds of restaurants, thus limiting generalization to the restaurant spectrum as whole.

Therefore, for future research, it would be desirable to replicate the proposed relationships in other categories of restaurants that are not full-service restaurants. Conceptually, some of the constructs in the model, like dining experience and restaurant image, have been examined from different perspectives (e.g. Jani and Han, 2011; Ryu et al., 2012). Dining experience, in this study, was divided into food, service, interpersonal interaction, atmospherics, price and pre-arrival experiences and some of these categories are noted to have a differential effect on customer loyalty. Thus, future studies that examine dining experience with its respective sub dimensions can shed more light on the construct and individual effect of its components on customer loyalty. Studies that make observation and enquiries into dining experience, perceived restaurant image and guest loyalty with respondents who have visited the restaurant more than once could yield better insights into their relationship. Adopting a longitudinal study tracing the impact of the constructs on guest loyalty is justified by the fact that loyalty builds with time and is liable to change over time, unlike its relatively static antecedents. Future research needs to investigate the influence of visit purpose on the relationship between the dining

experience components and guests satisfaction. Customers visit restaurants for different needs and therefore it is necessary to know how this affects satisfaction with different restaurant attributes.

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Further reading

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. *Factor analysis results for dining experience*

	Service	Food	Pre-arrival	I*	Price	A**
Restaurant table layout allowed me to move around easily	0.707					
Service personnel were neat and well dressed	0.706					
The restaurant staff were willing to help me	0.679					
The dining areas including cutlery were clean and safe	0.670					
The staffs showed patience	0.629					
I received care and individualized attention	0.598					
The service team was knowledgeable of everything I wanted	0.588					
The food was delicious.		0.702				
The food served was fresh		0.688				
The aroma of the food was enticing		0.646				
The food served was nutritious		0.642				
The food presentation was visually attractive		0.642				
I faced no hardships on the way to this restaurant			0.789			
I moved a short distance to reach this restaurant			0.780			
I did not get inconvenienced at the entrance			0.750			
Access to this restaurant site is easy			0.667			
The service personnel were cheerful				0.810		
The service personnel showed passion for their job				0.808		
The service personnel were polite				0.558		
There is a good range of prices for any guest to afford					0.844	
The prices are more appropriate as compared to other restaurants.					0.821	
The restaurant has attractive interior design and colors						0.816
The background music was soft and pleasing						0.674
Eigenvalues	4.29	3.03	2.88	2.86	1.70	1.52
Variance explained	17.19	12.03	11.55	11.45	6.80	6.08

* Interpersonal interaction; ** Atmosphere

KMO=0.938; Bartlett's test of sphericity=6632.650 (0.000)

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix 2. *Factor analysis results for restaurant image*

	Emotional image	Functional image
This restaurant is innovative and always looking forward	0.872	
It is prestigious to dine at this restaurant	0.759	
I feel this restaurant meets my needs	0.753	
At this restaurant everything is done to satisfy a guest	0.605	
The staff of this restaurant are professional	0.590	
This restaurant has good reputation		0.852
The staff's dress code is classic and professional		0.808
This restaurant offers better food compared to other restaurants around		0.577
Eigenvalues	3.30	3.24
Variance explained (%)	36.76	36.07

KMO=0.926; Bartlett's test of sphericity=3472.632 (0.000)
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix 3. *Factor analysis results for guest satisfaction*

	Evaluative satisfaction	Affective satisfaction
I am delighted with the services at this restaurant	0.827	
I think that choosing this restaurant was a wise choice	0.816	
This restaurant's services met my expectations	0.729	
Overall, I am happy with the dining experience at this restaurant		0.828
I am satisfied with my dining experience at this restaurant		0.816
Eigenvalues	2.17	1.81
Variance explained (%)	43.44	36.28

KMO=0.888; Bartlett's test of sphericity=1527.424 (0.000)
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix 4. *Factor analysis results for brand loyalty*

	Attitudinal loyalty	Cognitive loyalty I	Behavioral loyalty	Cognitive loyalty II
I will recommend this restaurant to someone who seeks my advice	0.899			
I will encourage friends to use this restaurant	0.858			
I will speak positively about this restaurant to other people	0.854			
I am likely to do whatever I can to help this restaurant do better	0.668			
I am likely to pay a little bit more for the services at this restaurant		0.782		
I am willing to pay more for this restaurant's services		0.712		
I will go out of my way to assist this restaurant		0.684		
I will only be using this restaurant			0.755	
Whenever I will need to eat out I will be coming to this restaurant			0.699	
I may sometimes to go another restaurant that offers similar services			0.659	
Price does not matter in my decision to remain with this restaurant				0.818
If this restaurant was to raise the price by 10%, I am likely to remain				0.728
Eigenvalues	3.14	2.28	1.68	1.48
Variance explained (%)	26.19	19.05	14.05	12.35

KMO=0.838; Bartlett's test of sphericity=2853.914 (0.000)
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Appendix 5. *Respondents profile (N= 348)*

		Frequency	Percent
Age	26 – 39	308	88.5
	40 – 59	36	10.3
	60 and above	4	1.2
Purpose of visiting this restaurant	Working meal	4	1.2
	Celebration	62	17.8
	Meeting	143	41.1
	Leisure	131	37.6
	Convenience	8	2.3
Origin	African	203	58.3
	American	105	30.2
	European	30	8.6
	Asian	10	2.9
Highest educational level	Certificate	20	5.7
	Diploma	154	44.3
	Bachelors degree	138	39.6
	Masters	36	10.4
Employment	Public sector	276	79.2
	Private sector	72	20.8
Monthly gross income*	Not above 600,000	13	3.8
	600,000 – 899,999	72	20.8
	900,000 – 1199,999	125	35.8
	1,200,000 – 1,499,999	79	22.6
	1,500,000 – 1,799,999	49	14.2
	1,800,000 – 2,099,999	3	0.9
	Above 2,099,999	7	1.9

*The currency is in Uganda Shillings