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The Effects of Brand Experience on the Perceived Value of Customers in China and Korea*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates causal relationships among brand experience, perceived value and brand support behavior in both Chinese and Korean consumers, and also examines the moderating effects of interaction with customers in the relationships between brand experience and perceived value. **Research design, data and methodology:** Three research were presented and examined empirically in this study. First research question is about relationships among brand experience, perceived value and brand support behavior. Second is about the moderating role of interaction with customers and third is about the differences in the causal relationships between China consumers and Korean consumers. A total of 377 samples who had visited theme parks in China and Korea were surveyed. **Results:** Sensory experience, emotional experience, and cognitive experience have significant causal relationships with perceived value in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Perceived value has a positive effect on brand support behavior and interaction with customer has a moderating effect between brand experience variables and perceived value in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Second, the causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value is not significant in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Third, there were significant differences in the effects of emotional experience and cognitive experience on perceived value between Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. **Conclusions:** Managers of theme park industry should design experience programs considering various brand experience variables for both Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. Second, it is necessary to raise the level of customer interaction between employees and customers.

Keywords: Brand experience, Perceived Value, Chinese and Korean Consumer, Interaction with Customer

JEL Classifications: M3, M31 , M54.

1. Introduction^a

* This paper was modified and developed from the Ph.D. thesis of the first author.

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The COVID-19 crisis has reduced people's outdoor activities. The theme park industry is suffering like other industries. Recently, however, outdoor activities centered on outdoor sports are increasing again, and the theme park industry could soon recover. It is worth noting that Korean theme parks are visited not only by domestic consumers but also by overseas consumers who visit Korea. In particular, Chinese consumers travel to Korea a lot under the influence of the Korean Wave and visit theme parks, so the domestic theme park industry needs to study Chinese tourists. As China's economic growth continues and the potential for economic growth is great, business opportunities for China are still great. China is sending countless tourists abroad and the number of tourists continues to increase, which could continue to increase the impact of Chinese tourists on the domestic tourism and theme park industries. The domestic theme park industry can use Chinese tourists visiting Korea as a very good opportunity for market growth (Lee et al., 2013).

Consumers visiting theme parks perceive value through various experiences. Experiential marketing has been recognized as important in the tourism industry (Zarantonello et al., 2007). Managers of theme parks are said to offer a variety of experiences that consumers demand (Srivastava & Kaul, 2014). Managers are able to manage the emotional, functional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences that customers perceive, creating a competitiveness that is very difficult for competitors to imitate (Hoffmann & Birnbruch, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to study experiential marketing at theme parks not only for existing Korean consumers but also for potential Chinese consumers. On the other hand, there are social and cultural differences between China and Korea. Because social and cultural environments influence consumer behavior, there can be differences between Chinese and Korean consumers in consumer behavior at theme parks. Existing studies have also confirmed that there are differences in consumer behavior between Chinese and Korean consumers in discount stores, festivals, and restaurants (Hwang et al., 2012). In the theme park industry, it will also be necessary to check whether Chinese and Korean consumers differ in consumer behavior related to brand experience.

In this study, the paths from various brand experience variables to consumer perceived value and brand support behavior in the theme park are examined. The moderating roles of interaction with customer and consumer nationality in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value are also examined. Although there is an existing study related to this research model (Cheong & Kim, 2019), this study expanded that study by including not only Korean consumers but also Chinese consumers. This study will suggest implications for the Korean theme park industry to enter the Chinese market or conduct active marketing for Chinese consumers visiting Korea.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Experience

Brand experience is an overall behavioral response that is caused by a variety of stimuli associated with the brand, such as brand design, identity, environment, and package, as well as subjective responses from consumers such as cognitive, emotional, and sensory responses to the brand (Schmitt, 1999). Brand experience can be categorized into various types. Schmitt (1999) divided types of brand experience into relational, emotional, cognitive, sensory, and behavioral experiences, while others categorized brand experiences into sensory, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In this study, the brand experience was divided into sensory, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive experiences.

Sensory experience is related to stimulating five sensory organs: smell, hearing, touch, sight, and taste to convey aesthetic pleasure, beauty, and satisfaction. Sensory experience highlights the five senses of people involved in a product or service (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Emotional experiences are trying to both influence consumers' motivation to buy and appeal to consumers' feelings through special moods or feelings for a company's products or services (Park, Park, & Cha, 2007). Emotional experiences arise through interaction between firms and consumers and can form emotional ties (Mathwick & Malhotra, 2001). In other words, emotional experiences arise from interactions between consumers and businesses, which can lead to close relationships between consumers and firms. Behavioral experience is a physical response that consumers experience through the brand. Behavioral experience is motivated by consumers to express their lifestyle (Too et al., 2001). Cognitive experience is about encouraging consumers to have a positive perception of a company's products or services and to think creatively. It can cause consumers to have a positive perception of the company's products or services (Schmitt, 1999). Cognitive experience is related to stimulating one's curiosity to think (Brakus et al., 2009).

2.2. Perceived Value and Brand Support Behavior

The perceived value of a customer is the overall evaluation of the value of a product or service based on the benefits received through the product or service at the expense of using or acquiring the product or service (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Sanchez et al. (2006) stated that perceived value is the monetary value of the cost that consumers pay to use the product or service, the emotional value of joy, and the social value of interpersonal relationships. Slevitch & Amit (2008) stated that perceived value is a consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or service. In general, the perceived value of a customer is defined as a comprehensive assessment by consumers in terms of the benefits acquired and the costs paid. In this study, consumers focus on the value that consumers perceive through their experience in theme parks.

Perceived value of customers is an important factor in increasing attitudes, satisfaction and loyalty (Sanchez et al., 2006; Rust et al., 2000; Siegrist et al., 2008). Therefore, many studies in marketing have studied the perceived value of customers as a independent or dependent variable of other variables. On the other hand, there is a concept of brand support behavior that means supporting one's favorite brand based on one's positive relationships with a particular brand. Brand supporting behavior is shown by positive word of mouth, recommendation, repurchase behavior and continuous use (Anisimova, 2007). In particular, continuous use intention means that users intend to continue to use a particular brand after first use of that brand (Bhattacharjee, 2001), which is an important brand-supporting behavior and is a key concept for maintaining close relationships between firms and consumers (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Perceived value of the customer has a positive impact on brand support behaviors, including intention of recommendation and continuous use (McMillan & Hwang, 2002). Brand support behaviors are represented by positive word of mouth and brand attachment through perceived value to the brand (Tournois, 2015). Therefore, it is important to look at brand support behavior along with perceived value.

2.3. Customer Interaction and Consumer Nationality

In many service industries, customers and employees interact and the interaction between customers and employees affects a company's business performance (Bitner, Brwon, & Meuter, 2000). Interactions with customers can create relationships between customers and employees and these relationships can form trust and intimacy. Interaction with customers includes emotions such as understanding, respect and consideration of customers and the quality of interaction with customers consists of dimensions of empathy, reliability and responsiveness (Schneider & Bowen, 1993). The interaction between employees and customers of a service company has a significant impact on the satisfaction formed by the customer's various experiences (Bowman and Narayandas, 2001). Therefore, in the service industry, interaction with customers plays a major role in the perceived value and satisfaction.

Chinese and Korean consumers have both something in common and differences. There are differences in consumer culture and consumption environment although China and South Korea have a close relationship each other in terms of history and geography (Fan, 2011). Recently, as China has grown to be Korea's largest trading partner, comparative studies have been conducted on the differences between China and Korea. Hwang et al. (2012) confirmed that there is a difference in consumer propensity of Chinese and Korean consumers at large discount stores. Chinese and Korean consumers differ in the relationship between shopping experience value, brand equity, and customer loyalty at large discount stores. Research shows that Chinese consumers' aesthetic consumption propensity and symbolic consumption propensity are higher than Korean consumers and Korean consumers' hedonic consumption propensity is higher than Chinese consumers. Wang et al. (2013) confirmed that there is a difference between Chinese and Korean consumers in the impact of price and salesperson expertise on consumer attitudes. This study tried to explore the differences between Korean and Chinese consumers in the impact of consumers' brand experiences on perceived value in the theme park industry. The perceived value of a customer is the overall evaluation of the value of a product

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

This study examines the path from brand experience to perceived value and brand support behavior of both Chinese and Korean consumers. Existing research has comprehensively explored the path from brand experience to perceived value and brand support behavior and the moderating role in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value. (Cheong & Kim, 2019). This study sought to expand the existing research to explore the commonalities and the differences between Korean and Chinese consumers in the impact of consumers' brand experiences on perceived value in the theme park industry.. Therefore, the main research questions that this study is trying to explore are as follows.

Research question 1. How is the path from brand experience to perceived value and brand support behavior in both Chinese and Korean samples?

Research question 2. Does interaction with customers play a moderating role in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value in both Chinese and Korean samples?

Research question 3. Is there a difference between Chinese and Korean consumers in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value

3.2. Research Method

3.2.1. Data Collection

This study collected data on Korean and Chinese consumers who have visited theme parks. A survey was conducted on university students in their 20s and 30s who mostly use theme parks. The collected samples were 460 including 260 Chinese consumers and 200 Korean consumers. This study used 377 samples 210 Chinese consumers and 167 Korean consumers for empirical analysis because there are 83 samples excluding unfaithful responses. The final analysis is for 210 Chinese consumers and 167 Korean consumers.

The questionnaire was written in Korean and Chinese respectively. Experts who know Korean and Chinese well participated in the process of developing the questionnaire to secure its validity. This study used SPSS 21.0 and Amos 21.0 for empirical analysis. This study used preliminary analysis such as reliability and validity test. This study used path analysis and multiple group analysis also.

3.2.2. Variables and Measurement

Brand experience can be defined as a subjective and behavioral response in terms of the emotions, sensations, cognitions and behaviors of customers induced by the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Zarantonello, Schmitt, & Brakus, 2007). For the measurement of brand experience, four dimensions of questions were modified and supplemented: sensory experience, behavioral experience, cognitive experience, and emotional experience used by Brakus et al. (2009).

The perceived value of a customer can be defined as the perceived degree of consumers' perception of the various values expected when using a product or service (Ekinci, Al-Sabbahy & Riley, 2004). The survey questions used by Deng et al. (2010) for the measurement of perceived value were modified and supplemented. Interaction with customers is defined as the frequency of face-to-face contact and non-face contact with customers (Bowman & Narayandas, 2001). The survey questions used by McMillan and Hwang (2002) for measuring interaction with customers were modified and supplemented, and measured through questionnaire responses.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

4.1.1. Samples

The samples of this study included 210 Chinese consumers and 167 Korean consumers. The gender distribution of Chinese consumers was 119 (56.7%) for men and 91 (43.3%) for women. The age distribution of Chinese consumers was the largest with 119 people (56.7%) in their 20s, and the occupation distribution of Chinese consumers was 137 students (65.2 percent). The gender distribution of Korean consumers was 94 men (56.3%) and 73 women (43.7%). Korean consumers had the largest job distribution with 119 students (71.3%).

The samples in this study were judged to be suitable for comparative analysis because both Chinese and Korean consumers were similar distributions in gender, occupation, age, and educational background. In particular, Many of the samples are young people in their 20s because they are consumers who mainly use theme parks.

4.1.2. Reliability and Validity

First, the Cronbach's α values were checked in order to verify the reliability of the variables, t All the Cronbach's α values

of the variables were greater than 0.6 as shown in Table 1 and these results confirmed that reliability of the measurement are verified.

Next, Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to verify the convergent validity. First, Measurement model fit was assessed. The fit indices of measurement model ($X^2=376.459$, $DF=231$, $CMIN/DF=1.630$, $GFI=0.921$, $NFI=0.946$, $CFI=0.978$, $RMSEA=0.041$) are shown to be acceptable. Next, Convergent validity was checked using the values of factor loading, composite reliability and average variance extracted. The values of standardized factor loadings in all items are greater than 0.5, the values of composite reliability are greater than 0.7 and the values of average variance extracted are greater than 0.5 in the cases of all the variable. The values of factor loading, composite reliability and average variance extracted confirmed the convergent validity of measurement are verified. Table 1 shows the analysis results for verifying the reliability and validity of measurement.

Table 1: Reliability and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variable	Items	Standardized Estimates	S.E	t-value	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Sensory Experience(SE)	SE1	0.865	-	-	0.904	0.901	0.703
	SE2	0.834	0.048	20.872*			
	SE3	0.840	0.049	21.151*			
	SE4	0.813	0.051	19.999*			
Emotional Experience(EE)	EE3	0.836	-	-	0.855	0.849	0.663
	EE4	0.838	0.056	19.525*			
	EE5	0.767	0.055	17.137*			
Behavioral Experience(BE)	BE1	0.785	-	-	0.834	0.836	0.627
	BE2	0.811	0.065	16.045*			
	BE3	0.779	0.063	15.382*			
Cognitive Experience(CE)	CE2	0.776	-	-	0.819	0.813	0.601
	CE3	0.782	0.065	15.789*			
	CE4	0.768	0.065	15.460*			
Customer Perceived Value(PV)	PV2	0.802	-	-	0.830	0.831	0.619
	PV3	0.787	0.058	17.390*			
	PV5	0.771	0.058	16.891*			
Brand Support Behavior(BSB)	BSB2	0.809	-	-	0.876	0.877	0.638
	BSB3	0.785	0.061	17.001*			
	BSB4	0.781	0.064	16.884*			
	BSB5	0.819	0.060	18.020*			
Interaction with Customers(IWC)	IWC2	0.839	-	-	0.895	0.895	0.681
	IWC3	0.818	0.053	18.790*			
	IWC4	0.818	0.054	18.815*			
	IWC6	0.826	0.052	19.083*			
$X^2 = 376.459$, $DF = 231$, $CMIN/DF = 1.630$, $GFI = 0.921$, $NFI = 0.946$, $CFI = 0.978$, $RMSEA=0.041$							

Discriminant validity can be verified if the AVE value of each variable is greater than the square value of inter-variable correlation coefficient. Table 2 compares the square values of correlation coefficient between different variables with the diagonal showing the AVE of the corresponding variable. The values of AVE are greater than the square values of correlation coefficient, which generally confirmed the discriminant validity of the variables. Both convergent validity and discriminant validity of this study were verified.

Table 2: Reliability and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sensory Experience	0.703						
Emotional Experience	0.246	0.663					

Behavioral Experience	0.326	0.172	0.627				
Cognitive Experience	0.321	0.217	0.166	0.601			
Customer Perceived Value	0.413	0.388	0.336	0.368	0.619		
Brand Support Behavior	0.273	0.119	0.299	0.310	0.504	0.638	
Interaction with Customers	0.269	0.292	0.231	0.219	0.278	0.254	0.681

Note: The figures of this table: the square values of correlations between variables, AVE of variables

4.2. Main Analysis

4.2.1. Causal Relationships

In this study, the relationships among brand experience, perceived value and brand support behavior were tested. The results of the path analysis on the all samples of Chinese and Korean consumers are summarized in Table 3. The structural model fit was assessed and the fit indices of measurement model ($X^2=297.430$, $DF=159$, $CMIN / DF = 1.871$, $GFI = 0.924$, $NFI = 0.948$, $CFI = 0.975$, $RMSEA=0.060$) are shown to be acceptable.

Table 3: Path Analysis and Test Results: All samples

Causal Relationships (Paths)	All Samples		
	Standardized Coefficient	C.R.	Results
Sensory Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.347	3.918*	Significant
Emotional Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.390	3.845*	Significant
Behavioral Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.032	0.777	Not Significant
Cognitive Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.323	3.257*	Significant
Customer Perceived Value --> Brand Support Behavior	0.911	16.142*	Significant

Note: *: $p < 0.05$

The causal relationship between sensory experience and perceived value is significant (coefficient=0.347, t -value=3.918, $p < 0.001$). The causal relationship between emotional experience and perceived value is significant also (coefficient=0.390, t -value=3.845, $p < 0.001$). However, the causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value is not significant (coefficient=0.032, t -value=0.777, $p > 0.5$). The causal relationship between cognitive experience and perceived value is significant (coefficient=0.323, t -value=3.257, $p < 0.01$). The causal relationship between perceived value and brand support behavior is significant also (coefficient=0.911, t -value=16.142, $p < 0.001$). These test results are the same as those of previous research conducted only on Korean consumers (Cheong & Kim, 2019).

The results of the path analysis on Korean sample and the results of the path analysis on Chinese sample are shown respectively in Table 4. Each structural model fit was assessed. The fit indices of Chinese samples ($X^2=212.814$, $DF=159$, $CMIN/DF=1.338$, $GFI=0.913$, $NFI=0.895$, $CFI=0.939$, $RMSEA=0.060$) are shown to be acceptable. The fit indices of Korean samples ($X^2=259.902$, $DF=159$, $CMIN/DF=1.635$, $GFI=0.864$, $NFI=0.895$, $CFI=0.956$, $RMSEA=0.060$) are shown to be acceptable also although GFI and NFI do not meet the criterion by a very small difference.

The results of the path analysis on Chinese sample shows the significant causal relationships between variables except for the causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value. The causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value in Chinese samples is not significant (coefficient=-0.003, t -value=-1.012, $p > 0$). The results of the path analysis on Korean sample also shows the significant causal relationships between variables except for the causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value. The causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value in Korean samples is not significant (coefficient=0.047, t -value=0.638, $p > 0.5$).

Table 4: Path Analysis and Test Results: Chinese VS Korean

Causal Relationships (Paths)	Chinese samples	Korean samples
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	Standardized Coefficient	C.R.	Results	Standardized Coefficient	C.R.	Results
Sensory Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.338	2.005	Significant	0.411	3.881*	Significant
Emotional Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.493	2.861*	Significant	0.344	2.558*	Significant
Behavioral Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	-0.030	-1.012*	Not Significant	0.047	0.638	Not Significant
Cognitive Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.459	2.200*	Significant	0.243	1.987*	Significant
Customer Perceived Value --> Brand Support Behavior	0.924	12.902*	Significant	0.885	9.906*	Significant

Note: *: $p < 0.05$

4.2.1. Moderating Role

In this study, the moderating roles of customer interaction in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value are tested. First, the samples were divided into two groups, the group with low levels of customer interaction and the group with high levels of customer interaction. Then, to verify the significant difference between two groups, multiple group analysis called Pairwise Parameter Comparisons was performed. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 5.

The moderating effect of customer interaction between sensory experience and perceived value is significant (C.R.=2.106). The moderating effect of customer interaction between emotional experience and perceived value is significant also (C.R.=2.569). However, the moderating effect of customer interaction between behavioral experience and perceived value is not significant (C.R.=0.785). The moderating effect of customer interaction between cognitive experience and perceived value is significant (C.R.=2.053).

Table 5: Comparison between Groups and Test Results: Interaction with Customer

Causal Relationships (Paths)	Low Group		High Group		C.R. for Differences	Results
	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value		
Sensory Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.216	2.163*	0.434	2.508*	2.106*	Significant
Emotional Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.285	2.472*	0.640	3.012*	2.569*	Significant
Behavioral Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	-0.090	-0.521	0.109	0.869	0.785	Not Significant
Cognitive Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.255	2.976*	0.581	3.671*	2.053*	Significant

Note: *: $p < 0.05$

In this study, the moderating roles of consumer nationality in the causal relationship between brand experience and perceived value are examined. multiple group analysis called Pairwise Parameter Comparisons was performed to verify the significant difference between Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 6.

The moderating effect of consumer nationality between sensory experience and perceived value is not significant (C.R.=0.941). The moderating effect of consumer nationality between emotional experience and perceived value is significant (C.R.=2.101). The positive effect of emotional experience on perceived value is greater in Chinese consumer groups than in Korean consumer groups. The moderating effect of consumer nationality between behavioral experience and perceived value is not significant (C.R.=1.546). The moderating effect of consumer nationality between cognitive experience and perceived value is significant (C.R.=2.698). The positive effect of cognitive experience on perceived value is greater in Chinese consumer groups than in Korean consumer groups. The existence of differences between Chinese consumers and Korean consumers is consistent with the results of prior studies. China and Korea have different historical experiences and different lifestyles in modern society although they belong to the same Asian culture. In particular, the characteristics of Chinese people being more

influenced by Confucianism and placing more importance on emotions and relationships can be the causes of differences between Chinese consumers and Korean consumers in this study.

Table 6: Comparison between Groups and Test Results: Chinese VS Korean

Causal Relationships (Paths)	Chinese Samples		Korean Samples		C.R. for Differences	Results
	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	Standardized Coefficient	t-value		
Sensory Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.338	2.05*	0.411	3.881*	0.941	Significant
Emotional Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.493	2.861*	0.344	2.558*	2.101*	Significant
Behavioral Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	-0.030	-1.012	0.047	0.638	1.546	Not Significant
Cognitive Experience --> Customer Perceived Value	0.459	2.20*	0.243	1.987*	2.698*	Significant

Note: *: $p < 0.05$

5. Conclusions

This study investigated causal relationships among brand experience, perceived value and brand support behavior in both Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. Furthermore, this study examined the moderating effects of interaction with customers in the relationships between brand experience and perceived value. Besides, this study tried to analyze the difference between the Korean customers and the Chinese customers in the causal relationships between brand experience and perceived value. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows.

First, sensory experience, emotional experience, and cognitive experience have significant causal relationships with perceived value in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. However, the causal relationship between behavioral experience and perceived value is not significant in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Second, perceived value has a positive effect on brand support behavior in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Interaction with customer has a moderating effect between brand experience variables and perceived value in Both Chinese and Korean consumers. Third, there were significant differences in the effects of emotional experience and cognitive experience on perceived value between Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. The implications based on the findings of this study can be summarized as follows.

First, managers of theme park industry should design experience programs considering various brand experience variables for both Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. Second, it is necessary to raise the level of customer interaction between employees and customers. Third, to strengthen both emotional experience and cognitive experience is necessary for both experience marketing programs for Chinese tourists and the strategy to enter the Chinese market.

This study has several limitations and it needs to be improved in the future. First, the samples of this study are both Chinese consumers and Korean consumers. However, the samples from each country are organized around specific regions. In the future, samples covering various regions of China and Korea should be constructed to increase the generalization of the findings. Second, through this study, we identified differences depending on consumer nationality in the impact of brand experience on perceived value. In the future, it is also necessary to expand the research model by considering various consumer characteristic variables as moderator.

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