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Customer Experience:
A study of the away from home food consumption dynamics

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Thesis

Customer experience is a key concept within modern managerial approaches. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), among the first authors to discuss about this concept, customer experience is the next stage, after services, in the progression of economic value. At first, managers put the focus on the physical product, then to services and, as a more recent step, to experiences. There are lots of examples of successful companies following a customer experience-based strategy. Here below a series of quotes from some of the most influent CEOs of the last century:

> *"You've got to start with the customer experience and work back toward the technology, not the other way around."* (Steve Jobs)

> *"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."* (Jeff Bezos)

> *"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."* (Bill Gates)

Despite the academic community has analysed this concept under many perspectives - starting with Pine and Gilmore (1998), who gave a first managerial direction toward customer experience; Gentile et al. (2007), who formulated a customer experience model to understand the specific role of different experiential features in the success achieved by some well-known products; the study by Novak et al. (2000), which proposed a customer experience model applied to the on-line environment, that embodies the components of what makes for a compelling online experience; concluding with the conceptual model proposed by Verhoef et al. (2009), which investigates the elements that create customer experience in the retail environment - there is lack of a customer experience model applied to the *away from home* context in the extant literature. Given that, the attempt of the present thesis is to provide a model which comprises the main drivers of customer experience applied to the specific environment of the *away from*

home food consumption. In particular, besides the components of the offering, that are usually designated as the drivers of customer experience in the models present in literature, also the personal characteristics of the consumers related to food consumption will be taken into account.

On the basis of the last considerations, the main research question will be:

How do the different elements of the offering and personal attitudinal characteristics of the consumers affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?

Sub questions:

- How do the different components of the offering (social environment, service interface, atmosphere, food offering, price, brand prestige, eWOM) affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?
- How do consumer's characteristics (age, income, consumption purpose) moderate the effect of the components of the offering on the evaluation of customer experience?
- How does brand prestige moderate the effect of price on the evaluation of customer experience?

1.2 Previous Relevant Research and Contribution to the Literature

The first conceptual model considered to be relevant for the phenomenon under study, is the one proposed by Baker et al. (2002). This study explored the effects of environmental cues on the store assessment by customers. The concept under study is not exactly customer experience but store patronage intentions, that represents the assessment of a complete experience in a retail store by a customer. The proposed drivers of store patronage intentions are:

- Design perceptions
- Employee perceptions

- Music perceptions
- Time/effort cost perceptions
- Psychic cost perceptions
- Monetary price perceptions
- Interpersonal service quality
- Merchandise quality perceptions
- Merchandise value perceptions

This study has proved store environmental cues affect store patronage intentions, which represent the behavioral attitudes that customers have with respect to the store, directly or indirectly, through the perceived merchandise quality. The limitation of this research, as the other mentioned in this chapter, is that not all the drivers could be applied to the food consumption away from home environment, and, besides that, those drivers that still fit, could reasonably have a different impact on customer experience assessment in the *away from home* environment (e.g. restaurants) with respect to the *at home* environment (grocery stores).

Another study taken into consideration is the one consudcted by Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007). The study presents a conceptual model of the antecedents of customer experience, more consumer perceptions-oriented, based on the 'multidimensionality' of the mind concept. In the first part of the study there is an analysis of the aspects of customer experience on which a series of well-known companies focused in its strategies, while in the second part a market research has been performed to assess how customers perceive the different components of the customer experience. The authors assumed the following components as dimensions of the model:

- Sensorial component
- Emotional component
- Cognitive component
- Pragmatic component
- Lifestyle component
- Relational component

The results of the study demonstrated that the sensorial component has the overall highest impact on the customer experience assessment, while the relational one has the overall lowest impact.

The last customer experience model considered to be relevant, is the one developed by Verhoef et al. (2009). The research investigates the elements that create customer experience, adopting a theoretical approach. The proposed model provides for eight determinants of customer experience:

- social environment
- service interface
- retail atmosphere
- assortment
- price and promotions
- customer experience in alternative channels
- retail brand
- customer experiences at time *t-1*

This study takes into consideration new variables with respect to previous literature: The social environment component, that represents compatibility of the consumers inside the store, captures a new dimension to consider in the customer experience assessment, besides the interpersonal relationship with the store's employees. Also considering the impact of experiences in alternative channels represents an innovation with respect to past literature. Anyway, this last component doesn't apply to the away from home environment[1].

To fill the gap in literature, this thesis aims to formulate a customer experience model, specifically for the *away from home* environment, in particular applied to foodservice consumption. The consumption within the foodservice sector is increasing year by year. In particular, in some countries of European Union, like Spain and United Kingdom, the expenditures intended for food consumption are higher or equal in the away from home channel with respect to the at home channel (FIPE, 2017), In general, the food&beverage industry is growing in value, becoming more attractive over time. To make an example of the attractiveness of this industry, in

[1] The explanation of this sentence is reported in chapter 2.4.2 The Independent Variables, page 28.

the 2017, a tequila brand called Casamigos, founded by Mr. George Clooney with his friends in 2013, certainly not a leading brand in his market, has been purchased by the spirits giant Diageo for $1 billion[2]. This is a relevant amount, taking in consideration that Michael Kors Holdings Limited, a global fashion luxury group, has just announced that a definitive agreement has been signed to acquire all of the outstanding shares of Gianni Versace S.p.A., one of the world's leading luxury fashion companies, for a total value of approximately $2.12 billion[3].

1.3 Managerial Relevance

As a matter of fact, the Horeca channel lacks of the magnitude of data and information that are available for the retail market, whose dynamics are constantly under study. This study attempts to explore the dynamics of the customer experience, in relation to the specific *away from home*, food consumption context, in order to find out significant effects that could be implied by the players of the Horeca channel, for their strategies.

Following this study, it is believed that, for the management, it will be easier to understand what the drivers of customer experience in the specific context of full-service restaurants are. In particular, it will be tested how the various components of the offering, from the service interface to the brand prestige and the personal characteristics of the consumers, affect the customer experience. Acquiring this information, could drive the management of the different Food&Beverage industry players to take consistent decisions for their strategies within the Horeca channel.

1.5 Delimitations

Regarding the delimitations of this study, it has to be specified that the data collection is limited to the territory of central Italy, and so the generalizability of the results.
It was also decided to delimitate the testing of the model to a restricted types of store formats: the full-service restaurants, because they are supposed to comprehend more drivers in the

[2] www.nytimes.com (April 2017)
[3] http://investors.michaelkors.com

determination of the related customer experience, and to only one consumption occasion: the dinner.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is dedicated to the explication of the concepts under study. After an overview of the food consumption dynamics in Italy, the extant literature regarding the antecedents of food consumption and the *customer experience* concept will be analysed.

2.1 An Overview of the *Away from Home* food Consumption in Italy

In the following paragraphs will be defined and explored the Italian food consumption with respect to one segment: the *away from home*[4]. The away from home consumption is defined as the extra-domestic consumption of food and beverage with the exclusion of the *at home* auto-production of food intended for the out-door consumption (Capano, 2011). The distribution market of reference is the Horeca one, that refers to the public commercial establishments that administer food and beverage to the public with the purpose of in-store consumption as core business. These public establishments are defined foodservice establishments. The food consumption dynamics, especially the away from home ones, lack of research and structured analysis. The present research aims to explore the drivers under food consumption in the away from home context.

In the next paragraphs are reported some general data about food consumption in Italy with respect to Europe; the academic definitions relative to the sector; a customer's segmentation based on the consumption frequency and a foodservice establishment's segmentation based on the store format.

All the data reported in following paragraphs are extracted from the annual foodservice report of 2017 drawn up by FIPE[5] (*Federazione Italiana Pubblici Servizi*).

[4] In this thesis, the *away from home* consumption is referred only to the food & beverage market and, as a consequence, to the food consumption. It will be referred in this document with the expressions 'away from home' or 'AfH'.

[5]FIPE (Federazione Italiana Pubblici Esercizi) is an Italian association, leader in the foodservice market. The role of FIPE is to represent and assist Italian foodservice establishments. The objective is to consolidate the relationship between the members of the associations and the government, acting as the trait d'union. FIPE invests every year in researches and market investigations regarding the sector.

2.1.1 General Data

In Italy, from 2007 to 2016, the decline in consumption was of about 40 billion Euros. The 50 % of this decline is relative to the transport sector, the 16% to the food sector, while there is an exception for the "hotels and restaurants" segment, which has achieved an increase in consumption of 4.4 million Euros.

The impact of the economic crisis on the *at home* food consumption (-10,5% from 2007 to 2016) has increased the impact of the *away from home* food consumption on the total food spending in Italy, that is higher than the 35%, with a trending growth. The away from home consumption, from this point in this paragraph AfH consumption, is relative to the families' spending intended for restaurants and other foodservice establishments. This fact brings Italy in line with the average European data which is 63,1% for the food spending in the at home channel and the 36,9% for the AfH consumption. Anyway, in Europe there is high variability of this data among the different countries. For example, in Germany, the AfH spending weights only the 30% on the total food spending, while in Spain this data is equal to 53,6% and in the United Kingdom it's equal to 47,6%. Talking about absolute values, Italy is one of the first country in terms of value of foodservice market after Spain and UK. An important difference between Italy and the other European countries in this context, is that the economic crisis started in the 2007-2008, has produced a negative impact on the food & beverage consumption, especially on the AfH segment (the decline in consumption in Europe was of 8 billion of euros). In Italy this phenomenon was slightly different, because the major impact regarding the food & beverage market was registered on the at-home segment while the Italian AfH consumption variation from 2007 to 2016 was positive. In the 2016, the families' spending in foodservices was of about 80 million Euros and of 73 million in volume, with an increment of the 3% with respect to the previous year. From the 2011 to the 2016 there was a decline in the foodservice industry's value added of the 5%, but in the last years, the inverted trend brought the value added above the pre-crisis levels.

The data reported testify a positive trend in the away from home consumption spending in Italy, in contrast with the other European countries. Moreover, the Italian away from home spending

is not particularly sensible to the reduction in the disposable income. It means that this market is very attractive both in terms of investments and in terms of research and analysis of the consumption phenomenon.

2.1.2 A Consumer's Segmentation Based on the *Away from Home* Consumption Frequency

Here below there is a segmentation of the foodservice consumers in Italy given by FIPE depending on the frequency with which Italian consumers go to eat out in the away from home consumption context. The FIPE association conducted the survey interviewing a sample of 39 million Italian consumers.

The segmentation comprehends three types of consumer: *heavy* consumer; *average* consumer; *low* consumer. The first type of consumer is the one that consumes at least 3 or 4 meals away from home in a week; the second type is the consumer that consumes at least 2 or 3 meals away from in a week; the third type is the consumer that consumes at least 2 or 3 meals away from home in a month. The data are referred to all the consumption occasions, from breakfast to dinner.

According to this segmentation and taking into account the sample of 39 million Italian citizens, 13 million are *heavy* consumers, 9,7 million are *average* consumers and 16,5 million are *low* consumers.

Heavy consumers	*Average* consumers	*Low* consumers
25,6%	18,6%	32,9%

Tab. 1 - Italian citizens' away from home consumption frequency in percentage. Data gathered by FIPE in the *annual foodservice report*, 2017

The FIPE association made the same segmentation using the driver of frequency to the same sample regarding the following specific consumption occasions: breakfast; launch and dinner.

In the next paragraph are reported the data of the abovementioned segmentation regarding the dinner, because is the most complex consumption occasion, connected more frequently to both hedonic and utilitarian needs.

2.1.3 The Dinner

In this paragraph there's a more specific analysis of one consumption occasion: the dinner. The 60,9% of the interviewed 39 million of Italian consumers, have consumed at least one dinner away from home in a reference month. The average spending is between 10 and 20 Euros and the typical foodservice-format are *pizzeria* and *trattoria*. One third of the interviewed is willing to spend between 21 and 30 euros for a single dinner, while only 1 out of 100 interviewed are willing to spend more than 50 Euros for a dinner out. For the dinner the segmentation based on frequency has a different criterion: the heavy consumer consumes at least 3 or 4 dinners away from home in a week; the average consumer consumes at least 1 or 2 dinners away from home in a week; the low consumer consumes at least 1 or 2 dinners away from home in a month.

DINNER		
Heavy consumers	*Average* consumers	*Low* consumers
27,8%	32,3%	39%

Tab. 2 - Italian citizens' away from home consumption frequency in percentage with respect to dinner consumption occasion. Data gathered by FIPE in the *annual foodservice report*, 2017

An important fact regarding away from home consumption in Italy is that there are important territorial differences. Citizens from the north-west area are willing to spend more to go out for dinner. The 14,8% of those citizens interviewed spend more than 30 Euros per dinner. In the south-central area the situation is slightly different, in fact, more than 60% of the citizens from that area spend no more than 20 Euros to dine out. The prices in this market are also different depending on the region as a consequence of the different levels of the demand. For instance, the average price of a coffee away from home in Napoli, Reggio Calabria and Siracusa is 0,90 Euros while in Milan, Modena and Cremona it's 1,10 Euros[6].

2.1.4 A Foodservice Establishments' Segmentation Based on the Store Format

The classification of foodservice establishments presents many issues considering that there are different methods to make a segmentation, basing on different parameters and given the fact

[6] The data are referred to September 2017.

that the unit of interest is characterized by a high grade of heterogeneity. The following segmentation is based on the store format and is taken up by the work of Professor Capano G. above mentioned. The forms of food administration in Italy are: bar/cafeteria; restaurant; super Horeca. The first category, bar, is mainly used for consuming breakfast and quick lunches, so it responds to more utilitarian needs. The second category, restaurant, is intended for more complex consumption occasions: launch and/or dinner. It could fulfil both utilitarian and hedonic needs. The third category, super Horeca, refers to the clubs and all the Foodservice establishments manly active at night time. It responds predominantly to hedonic and social needs.

Restaurants could be further segmented in Full Service Restaurants (FSR) and Limited Service Restaurants (LSR). The first segment is composed by establishments with a relatively broad menu along with table, counter and/or both service and a wait staff. These establishments offer meals and snacks for immediate consumption primarily on-premise, though they may also offer takeout service. The second segment is composed by establishments whose patrons generally order or select items and pay before eating. Food and drink may be consumed on premises, taken out, or delivered to customers' locations.

2.1.5 The Horeca Channel

The term Ho.Re.Ca. or Horeca is an abbreviation for 'Hotellerie-Restaurant-Café'. This term is employed in Europe to identify the actors of the food & beverage market that operate in the 'away from home' consumption segment, distinct from the 'at home' consumption segment. Horeca indicates the market of the foodservice establishments that administer food & beverage to the public. Other equivalent terms employed in the sector and in literature are: *On Premise* and *Foodservice* market. In Italy there are many differences between the Horeca channel and the grocery channel. The grocery channel is intended for the at home consumption. One important difference is that the grocery channel is dominated by the *GDO* (*grande distribuzione organizzata*), composed by a limited number of structured distribution formats like supermarkets, while the operators of the Horeca channel, excepted the producer, that is present in both the channels, are less structured and higher in number. The concentration of sales and the importance of the brand/product is higher in the grocery channel. Generally, in the Horeca channel, the product category is more important than the specific brand of the product. Usually

consumers, before entering a foodservice establishment, have an idea of what kind of product to eat rather than a specific brand. This is slightly different in the grocery channel, where the brand has a central role in the consumption process. A common point is the element of proximity that in both the channels constitutes a limitation to the consumer's store selection process.

In the next paragraph, a more theoretical exploration of the away from home consumption, with a focus on the antecedents and the determinants, will be done.

2.2 The Antecedents of Food Consumption

To better explore the topic of consumption, in both the away from home and at home contexts, it is interesting to examine a series of publications regarding the consumption styles, their principles and antecedents, to understand the reasons behind food consumption.

During the 1980s, Holbrook and Hirschman started to explore the concept of "hedonic consumption" related to the intangible and subjective aspects of consumption, introducing a new hedonic perspective. The Hedonic consumption is defined as *"those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience"*. The hedonic perspective asserts that a product consumption experience is perceived by multiple senses and not only with the product linked and afferent sense (e.g., the taste with a food product). Besides that, the multisensory impressions are not only a response to the external stimuli, but they're also generated as images in the consumer's mind after the experience. These images could be *historic*, when they substantiate in a past event recognition, or *fantasy*, when they're not directly connected to prior experiences. In contrast with the traditional economic perspective, that views products as objects for which the consumers want to maximize the utility, typically measured with functional or tangible aspects, the hedonic consumption perspective views products as subjective symbols that can be related with emotional desires rather than only cognitive ones. Today, this perspective and the importance of the hedonic aspects in the product consumption dynamics is broadly recognized and implied by the relevant literature.

In the last decade, the hedonic consumption perspective has been adopted to study and classify the different sources and determinants of pleasure (Alba, Williams, 2013) and how it is

connected with the consumption styles (Cornil, Chandon, 2016). The connection between hedonic consumption and pleasure is that "a vital component of hedonic consumption is whether the experience of consuming a product or event is pleasurable". The pure sensory sources of pleasures are intuitive and immediately recognizable (e.g., sweet food is a sensory source of pleasure). For the other less intuitive sources a more in-depth analysis is required. According to the researchers Alba and Williams, there are two general categories of determinants of pleasure[7]: the product/service/event and the consumer's personal experience with the product/service/event. To the first category belong the *aesthetics* and *design* sources. Norman (2004), an important exponent of pleasurable design framework, argues that there are three levels of processing the products features: the *visceral level*, that is a more immediate response to the physical features of the products; the *behavioral level*, that relates to the functionality, usability and performance of the product and the *reflective level*, that includes also the meaning and the interpretation of the product to the consumer.

A similar classification was done by Jordan (2000), who proposes four types of pleasures: *physio-pleasures*, more sensory-based; *socio-pleasures*, derived from interpersonal relationships, *psycho-pleasures*, derived from cognitive and emotional reactions to the product use and *ideo-pleasures*, derived from more profound meanings and personal values. Aesthetics plays an important part in a consumer experience with a product as all the hedonic aspects of a product. According to Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan (2007), when consumers face a choice between a hedonically superior option (as a product with an appealing aesthetics) that fails to meet functional criteria and a functionally superior product that is less appealing hedonically, the letter is favoured, but when both options exceed basic functional and hedonic requirements, the hedonically superior is preferred. The second category encompasses those cases in which the personal interaction with the product can influence the consumer experience and so the pleasure. Basically, the consumer is a moderator of the experience and, depending on the personality traits, the products expectations and the product engagement, the consequent pleasure could be different. The expectations influence pleasure because consumers reactions to stimuli are formed in reference to their expectations of those stimuli. Regarding the product engagement, the pleasure derived by a product consumption could depend on the degree to which the consumer is involved in the consumption experience.

[7] For pleasure the authors intend how well the product experience meets expectations rather than the inherent pleasure of that experience

A further research (Cornil, Chandon, 2016) examines the differences between two contrasting pleasures related to food consumption: *visceral pleasure* and *epicurean pleasure*, and the consequent consumption effects. The visceral eating pleasure is defined as the *"short-lived hedonic relief created by the satisfaction of eating impulses".* It is triggered by visceral impulses such as hunger, internal emotional urges or external cues. The epicurean eating pleasure is defined as a more enduring pleasure *"derived from the aesthetic appreciation of the sensory and symbolic value of the food"*. The aim of the research was to compare the two different pleasures and understand the different effects on food consumption styles, through the construction of scales. The visceral eating pleasure has three main characteristics:

- It is beyond consumer's volition, so it cannot be controlled, and the consumer is not aware of it.
- It is a mean to satisfy an urge, so it's not an end itself. This means that the pleasure from eating can be substituted by any other hedonic pleasure, such as doing compulsive shopping.
- It is a unitary phenomenon which can be summarized by its valence, meaning it can be measured evaluating how good it feels to eat.

The visceral eating pleasure can be measured by two existing scales (van Strien et al., 1986): the *external eating*, refers to the external factors that can trigger pleasure, mainly the sensory properties of food; and the *emotional eating*, which refers to the internal emotions, usually negative, that can lead to the creation of an urgent need. In contrast, the epicurean eating pleasure has the opposed characteristics:

- It is within consumers volition.
- It's unrelated to impulses. It's not an automatic response to bodily urges, but a more profound, high-order eating pleasure. It could be described as the "pleasure of the mind" rather than only the "pleasure of the body".
- It cannot be captured simply by its valence, meaning the various components of the pleasure cannot be separated and measured, as they are linked to symbols and subjective values.

To measure the tendency of people to experience epicurean eating pleasure, the authors developed a scale of 29 items which are affirmations about the self, regarding the judgement of the

value of food sensations and the value of food as symbols, with a Likert scale structure anchored from 1 to 7. Following, the two constructs were correlated to the preferences for portion sizes (small or large) measured through a scale of 22 items. The results show that people experimenting more frequently epicurean eating pleasure are more incline to prefer small portion sizes of fine food and overall wellbeing, while people experimenting visceral eating pleasure tend to overeat and prefer quantity over quality.

An interesting categorization regarding more specifically the away from home food consumption and linked to the pleasure under consumption styles frame, is given by Professor Capano G. in the publication "Trade Marketing e Consumi Fuori Casa", 2011, drawn up by past literature[8]. There are two types of away from home consumption: *eat out* and *dine out.* The first category is referred to the consumption intended to satisfy the basilar need of nutrition. The drivers are utilitarian and functional. In this case the consumer chooses to outsource the process of preparing meals in alternative of the auto-production. The second category is referred to the consumption intended to satisfy the needs of entertainment, socialization, self-realization. The drivers are more hedonic. The consumer is searching for a unique experience. An example of the first category is a lunch break from work. In this case the consumer is having a utilitarian experience and the drivers will be mainly functional: the consumer wants to eat as quick as possible, so a fast service is required; the price is an important driver as the consumer prefers to invest less money possible for this type of consumption occasion considering that it's an outsourcing of the meal preparation. An example of the second category is a dinner out to celebrate a special event. The experience is more hedonic and the most important drivers for the consumer will be the foodservice establishment atmosphere, in terms of design, music and social environment; the prestige of the foodservice establishment's brand and other factors connected with the fulfilment of social and entertainment needs.

The way consumers experience food and the product in general, is a key element to understand the real antecedents of consumption. In the following paragraph there is an analysis of the relevant literature regarding customer experience models.

2.3 The *Customer Experience* Concept

[8] Clark and Wood, 1999; Park 2004.

Before discussing the *customer experience* in the away from home food consumption context, it's necessary to clarify the concept of customer experience itself. This paragraph is dedicated to an analysis of the customer experience in the extant literature with particular focus on the conceptual models. Some publications mentioned are more practical and managerial-oriented and focused on the implications produced by the customer experience, while other are more theoretical-oriented and focused on the antecedents of the customer experience construct, providing conceptual models. An important premise is that there is no study in the extant literature that applies customer experience to the away from home consumption/Horeca environment. This means that the literature analysed refers to the concept under study in a general way or applied to the retail environment and the mass market.

Pine and Gilmore are among the first authors to talk about customer experience in a book published in the 1999 called "The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage". This publication is very important because it starts to focus the attention on experiences when talking about value creation.

According to Pine and Gilmore, experiences are the next step in the progression of economic value (Fig. 1). The component of experience is *"a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods"* and should be specifically designed to upgrade the companies' offering. In the publication 'Welcome to the Experience Economy', the authors suggest how companies should shift from selling services to selling experiences, *"because consumers un-questionably desire experiences".*

An important definition of customer experience given by the authors in this paper is: *"An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable."*

The authors also published a book in 1999 called "The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage" were they continue exploring their concept of experience economy. The issue is that goods and services are becoming *commoditized*, so the way to increase the economic value of the offering is to create an experience for the customer.

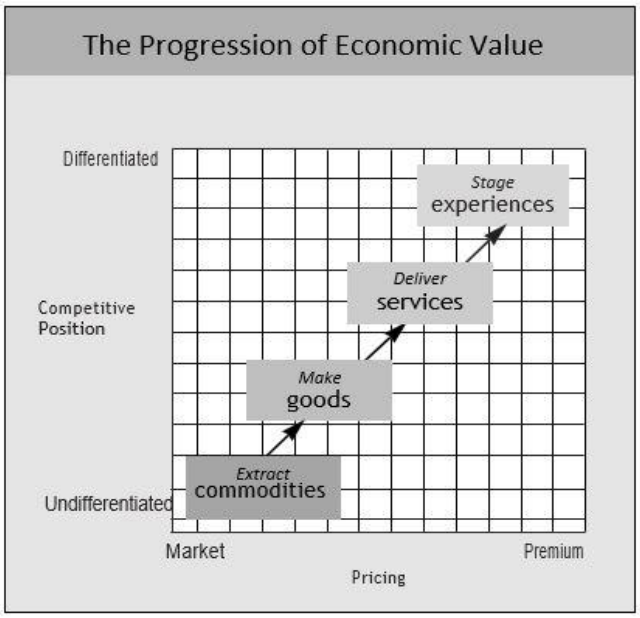

Fig. 1 - The progression of economic value (Pine and Gilmore, 1998)

The work done by Pine and Gilmore is practitioner-oriented, in fact it's focused on suggesting managerial actions to take advantage of the experiential component. It doesn't provide for a model to understand the antecedents, but it put a spotlight on the concept of *costumer experience*.

One of the first model that explored the effects of environmental cues on the store assessment by the customers is the one provided by Baker et al. (2002). The concept under study is not exactly customer experience but the *store patronage intentions*, that represents the assessment of a complete experience in a retail store by a customer. This construct could be considered as a proxy of the customer experience, making the results of the study expandable to a model that studies the effects of different variables (including environmental drivers) on customer experience. This research by Baker et al. investigates how store environment cues influence consumers' store choice decision criteria and the store's merchandise value perception through the creation of a conceptual model. Then, the authors empirically examine the extent to which environmental cues influence consumers' assessment of a store (store patronage intentions). The environmental cues under study are of three types: social; design and ambient. The study is referred to the retail environment.

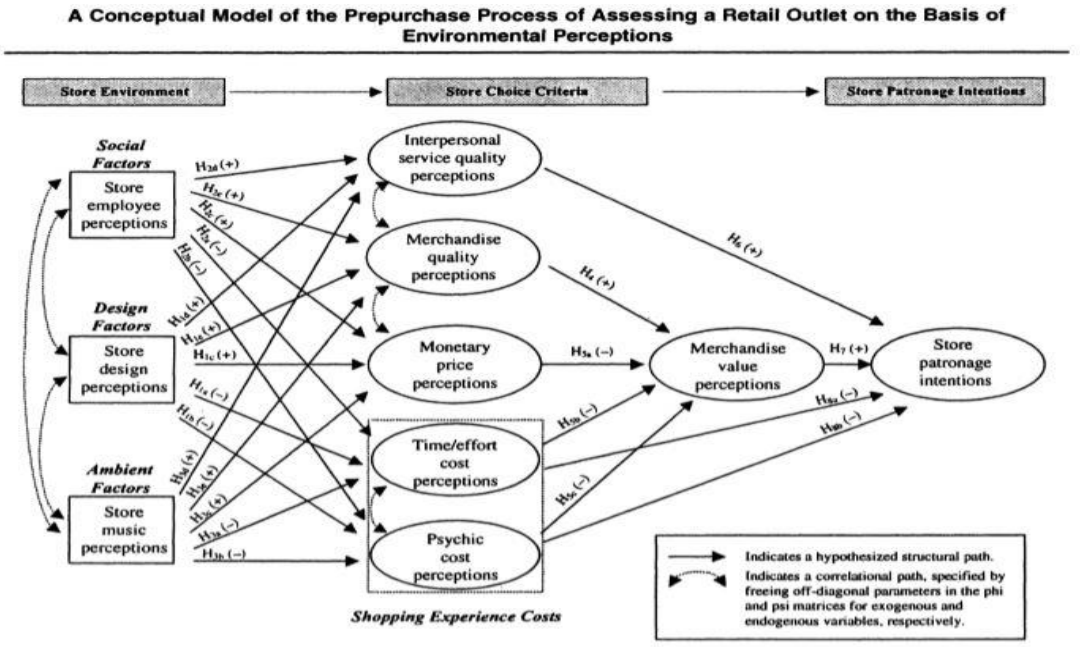

Fig. 2 – The conceptual model of the effects of store environmental cues on the store patronage (Beker et al.,2002)

The model (Fig. 2) provides for three store environmental factors that affect five different store choice criteria that, in turn, affect the merchandise value perception and, finally, the store patronage intentions. The authors argued that *"most price-quality research examines consumers' value judgments of a specific product-price combination. In contrast, our study focuses on the broader concept of retail store patronage (rather than product choice per se). We are interested in how people perceive the general price levels for a group of products sold in a store on the basis of what they observe in the store's environment. We label this group "merchandise" to distinguish it from a specific product or brand. Our study posits that merchandise value is a function of perceived merchandise price, merchandise quality, and shopping experience costs".* The construct *store patronage intentions,* aims to represent the evaluation given by the consumer of the overall store experience rather than the evaluation of the single merchandise offering. About the *store choice criteria*, the authors make a distinction between the *time/effort cost perceptions* (the time spent in stores looking or waiting for goods and services, which has an economic value to consumers) and the *psychic cost perceptions* (represents consumers' mental stress or emotional labor during the shopping experience). Then there is a distinction between the service quality perception, called *interpersonal service quality perception* (the quality of the interactions between store employees and customers) and the *merchandise quality perceptions*. The last store choice criterium is the *monetary price perceptions*.

Here below are listed the constructs with the relative scales that the authors employed to measure the components of the model:

- Design perceptions: pleasing color scheme; attractive facilities; organized merchandise.
- Employee perceptions: well-dressed employees; friendly employees; helpful employees.
- Music perceptions: pleasant music; appropriate music; bothersome music.
- Time/effort cost perceptions: shopping effort; time sacrifice; search effort.
- Psychic cost perceptions: unpleasant atmosphere; displeasing atmosphere; uncomfortable atmosphere.
- Monetary price perceptions: expensive gifts; too much money.
- Interpersonal service quality: treated well; personal attention; high-quality service; prompt service.
- Merchandise quality perceptions: high-quality gifts; high workmanship.
- Merchandise value perceptions: fair gift prices; good value; economical gifts.
- Store patronage intentions: willing to recommend; willing to buy; shopping likelihood.

The psychic cost perceptions items were measured on a six-point scale that indicated how accurately each adjective described the environment, from “extremely accurate” to “extremely inaccurate”. All other items were measured on seven-point sale anchored by “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree”. The assumptions of the research about the effect of *store environment cues* on *store choice criteria* are the following: as customers' perceptions of store design cues become more favorable, customers will perceive psychic costs and time/effort cost to be lower and monetary price, merchandise quality and interpersonal service quality to be higher. Of course, the higher is the perception of a store criteria, the higher will be the expectations of it. The same effect on store criteria is assumed for the other store environment cues. The assumptions about the effects of store choice criteria on merchandise value perception are: the higher consumers' merchandise quality perceptions, the higher their perceptions of merchandise value will be; the higher consumers' monetary price perceptions, the lower their perceptions of merchandise value will be; the higher consumers' time/effort cost and psychic cost perceptions, the lower their perceptions of merchandise value will be.

Now let’s analyse the assumptions about the determinants of store patronage intentions (which in the research is measured using the following items: willingness to recommend; willingness

to buy; shopping likelihood): the higher consumers' interpersonal service quality and merchandise value perceptions, the higher their store patronage intentions will be; the higher consumers' perceived time/effort costs and psychic cost, the lower their store patronage intentions will be. The results are visible in the table below (Fig. 3)[9]. There is also a differentiation between direct and indirect effect of the predictors on the dependent variables. The hypotheses are all confirmed with significance.

The relevant results of this study, from an experiential perspective, are the effects verified by the analysis of store environmental cues and merchandise value perception on store patronage intentions. In particular, the aspects to take into consideration for the present thesis, are that interpersonal service-quality perceptions, have a direct positive influence on store patronage intentions, as well as the store design perceptions, which exercise an indirect positive effect. On the contrary, monetary price perceptions have an indirect negative effect on store patronage intentions.

Even the customer experience model provided by Verhoef et al. (2009), which will be discussed in the next pages, is taken over from this model. Summing up, the variables that registered an indirect positive effect on store patronage intentions are: design perceptions; employee perceptions; music perceptions and merchandise quality perceptions (that it's affected by the environmental cues previously listed). The monetary price perception registered an indirect negative effect. The variables that registered a direct negative effect are time/effort cost perceptions and psychic cost perceptions, while the ones that registered a direct positive effect are interpersonal service quality perceptions and merchandise value perceptions.

[9] The values given in brackets are the t-values.

Examining Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects of Predictor Variables on Merchandise Value Perceptions and Store Patronage Intentions

	Merchandise Value Perceptions			Store Patronage Intentions		
Predictor Variables	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect
Design perceptions	.16 (2.80)		.16 (2.80)	.43 (10.46)		.43 (10.46)
Employee perceptions				.07 (3.82)		.07 (3.82)
Music perceptions	.17 (3.37)		.17 (3.37)	.11 (4.34)		.11 (4.34)
Monetary price perceptions		−.91 (−11.26)	−.91 (−11.26)	−.34 (−6.77)		−.34 (−6.77)
Merchandise quality perceptions		.64 (8.69)	.64 (8.69)	.24 (5.99)		.24 (5.99)
Interpersonal service quality perceptions					.23 (4.58)	.23 (4.58)
Time/effort cost perceptions					−.17 (−3.21)	−.17 (−3.21)
Psychic cost perceptions					−.31 (−5.68)	−.31 (−5.68)
Merchandise value perceptions					.37 (7.85)	.37 (7.85)
Squared multiple correlation			.68			.54

Notes: Standardized path estimates are reported with t-values in parentheses. All path estimates are significant at $p < .01$.

Fig. 3 - The effects of store environmental cues on merchandise value perception and store patronage intentions (Beker et al., 2002)

The next research (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007) defines the concept of customer experience in a theoretical way summarizing all the relevant literature on the subject. The study also presents a conceptual model of the antecedents of customer experience.

The paper attempts to understand the specific role of different experiential features in the success achieved by some well-known products through the submission of a survey to several group of customers. The set of branded products selected for the research are: Swatch; Pringles; Harley Davidson; Smart; iPod; Nike; H.C. Brands Bar; Playstation; Gatorade; McDonald's; Ikea; Swarovski. Following the results of the empirical investigation there is the suggestion of an interpretative model for the components of the customer experience. The authors provide the following definition of customer experience taking into account other relevant scientific contributions[10]: *"The customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels. Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of*

[10] LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005; Schmitt, 1999.

contact or touch-points". The last definition was mentioned in many researches following this publication.

To build the model the authors started with the concept of 'multidimensionality' of the customer experience. This concept was taken over from the studies of many psychologists and behaviorists, that considered the mind to be composed of many modules with different functions. The three basic systems/modules recognized are: sensation; cognition and affect. The authors of the model under study assumed the following components as dimensions of the customer experience model: sensorial component; emotional component; cognitive component; pragmatic component (it comes from the practical act of doing something); lifestyle component (it refers to the affirmations of the system of values and beliefs of the customer); relational component (involves the social context and the customer's relationship with other people in general).

These dimensions were drawn from two previous publications. The first, by Shmitt (1999), proposed a modular conceptualization of customer experience and identified five *experiential modules:* sensory experiences; affective experiences; creative cognitive experiences; physical experiences and social-identity experiences. The second publication, by Fornerino et al. (2006), identified five dimensions: sensorial-perceptual; affective; physical-behavioral; social and cognitive.

There are two phases of the research. In the first part there is an analysis of the aspects of customer experience on which the selected companies focused in its strategies (the company selected are characterized by successful and widely-known brands with a very strong image) for the products above mentioned. In the second part a market research has been performed to assess how customers perceive the different components of the customer experience. Considering the last part of the research there are two main analysis that have been performed: the first one investigates the relevance of the hedonic value with respect to the utilitarian value on the customer experience. The results demonstrate that overall the experiential features are perceived as much relevant than the functional ones; the second analysis was oriented at determining the scores of each experiential component for each product under case. The scores obtained by each component were divided into three groups depending on their distance to the mean (2,5): scores much above the mean; scores near the mean; scores below the mean. The results (Fig. 4) show that the sensorial component has the overall highest score while the relational one has the overall lowest score. The pragmatic component (which can be also defined as the

functional component) has a general high score. Same situation for the emotional component. The cognitive component has more 'above' and 'near the mean' scores than 'below the mean' scores, while the lifestyle component has registered an average low performance.

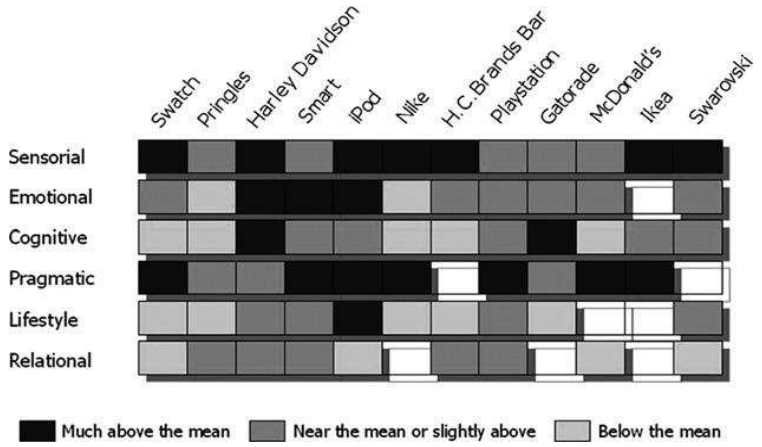

Fig. 4 - The results of the survey showing the value associated with the sensorial components (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007)

In the last part of the research a factor analysis was performed to study whether the experiential components were actually being perceived separately by customers or not. The results show that each case reported both pure components and mixed components. It means that the perception of a certain component can affect the perception of another one, so the customer experience is a complex experience and customers are not able to separate the components of the experience.

There is a problem of generalizability of the results due to the non-statistical sample to whom the questionnaire has been submitted. The questionnaire is structured in three parts: the first one is aimed to gather demographic information; the second is aimed to investigate the motivations under the purchase decisions; the third collects the evaluation of the different customer experience components to understand which one is considered more relevant. For every product under study was made a different questionnaire, depending on the core functionality[11].

The final considerations about this study are that: consumers recognize an important part of the offering's value to the experiential sphere and, regardless the context, they want to live positive consumption experiences; the importance of the experience doesn't imply the neglection by the

[11] The questionnaire for the iPod could be consulted in the appendix 2.

customers of the functional features, which are considered sometimes required standards and sometimes factors enabling a positive experience (so the functional component could be considered as a driver of customer experience).

A relatively recent study proposing a model for customer experience in the retail environment is the one conducted by Verhoef et al. (2009). The research investigates the elements that create the customer experience adopting a theoretical approach. Indeed, this paper considers both the elements under the retailer's control and the elements that are out of the retailer's control. The customer experience is considered a holistic construct that involves the cognitive, affective, social, emotional and physical responses of the customer.

To define customer experience, the authors adopted the abovementioned definition given by Gentile, Spiller and Noci and the related definition given by Meyer and Schwager: *"Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company".* The authors propose a conceptual model of customer experience, delineating its determinants. The conceptual model (Fig. 5) provides for eight determinants of customer experience: social environment; service interface; retail atmosphere; assortment; price and promotions; customer experience in alternative channels; retail brand and past experiences. About the last component the authors argue that the current customer experience at time *t* is affected by past customer experiences at time *t-1*. There are also considered two types of moderators, one type is represented by the consumers' goal for the shopping trip (task-oriented vs experiential-oriented), the other stands for the situational factors that can moderate the effect of the main components on the customer experience that are: the type of store; the channel (PoS or e-commerce); the consumer's culture; the season; the economic climate and the competitive intensity.

The social environment component refers both to the relationship between the customer and his own group (e.g., family, friends, partner, etc.) and to the customer-to-customer relationships inside the PoS. The authors have analysed different kind of customers that can affect in a positive or negative way the experience of the other customers inside the stores. A knowledgeable customer may be helpful and assist other customers playing the role of an advisor, or could be disruptive, for example talking loudly during a movie, and compromise the experience of other customers. Occasionally, customers could also adopt disturbing behaviour in the attempt to

sabotage the company. So, since the customers share the retail environment, it's important to attract compatible customers.

The customer brand perception is analysed in particular with respect to the retail brand. The authors considered the brand perception as an important prime of the customer experience. The interaction between the brand and the customer experience has been also analysed from the opposite direction. In fact, a certain customer experience could also influence the overall brand perception.

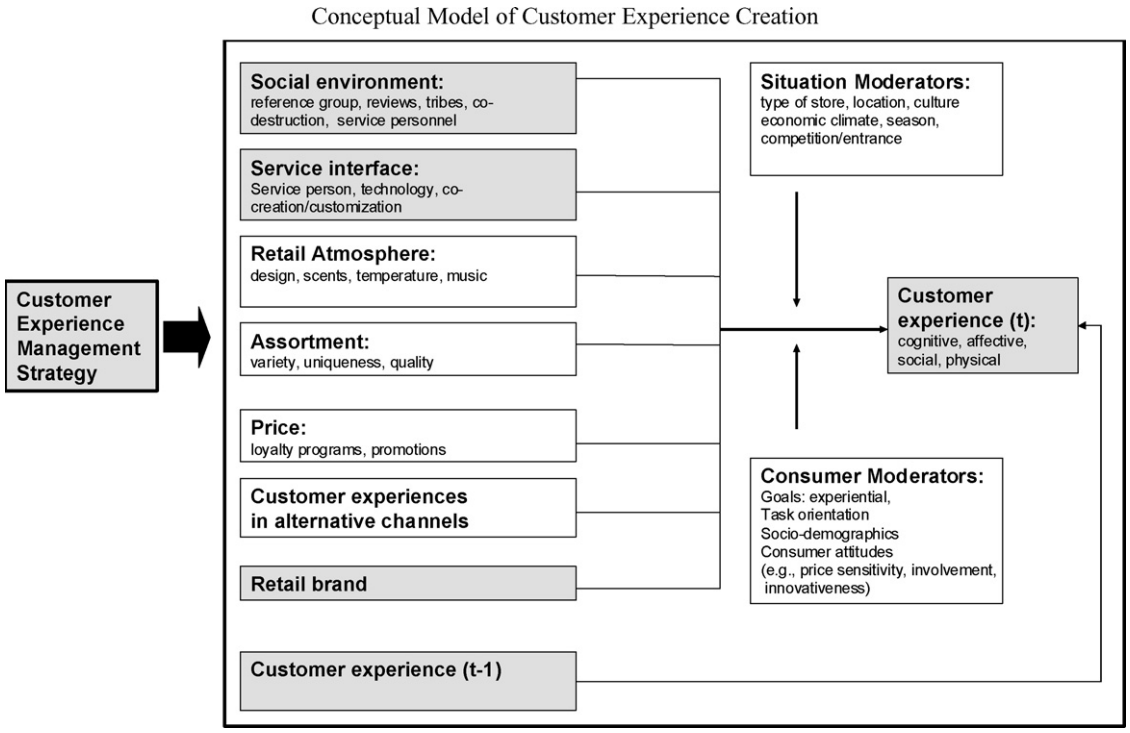

Fig. 5 - Conceptual model of customer experience creation (Verhoef et al, 2009)

All the drivers of the conceptual model were drawn from previous literature. In particular the following components are resumed from the model about the effects of store environment cues on store patronage intentions by Beker et al. previously analysed: social environment; service interface; atmosphere; price; assortment. The component *customer experience in alternative channels* was resumed from a study by Neslin et al. (2006), but it won't be analysed in the present thesis, because it doesn't represent an element of interest for the away from home food consumption environment. Indeed, for the at home consumption, the existence of the choice between different channels is a matter of fact, but it doesn't apply to the away from home consumption contexts. For instance, to have dinner at home consumers can decide among cooking

themselves, take away a meal from a restaurant or make use of home-delivery services (Just Eat plc). For what concerns a dinner out, the presence of these multiple channels doesn't exist.
An important consideration about the last research is that customer experience is analysed in a dynamic perspective. The customer experience is not limited to customer's interaction in the store, but also with the other *touch-points*. So, the experience comprehends the search, purchase, consumption and after-sales phases. Besides that, the model is well-structured and contains objective variables easy to be measured, with respect to the Gentile et al. model, which considers more subjective variables like the emotional state, more difficult to measure and standardize.

The purpose of the present thesis is to build a customer experience model that applies to the away from home food consumption context, considering objective and measurable variables when possible, avoiding going too much in depth with the single components, but trying to remain general, in order to apply the model to as much situations possible.

2.4 The Conceptual Model and The Hypothesis Development

Following the aspects emerged from the literature analysed regarding food consumption and later customer experience, a conceptual model of customer experience drivers applied to away from home food consumption (Fig. 6), has been developed.

It is important to underly the fact that all the relevant customer experience models existing in literature, don't fit the away from home environment. This is because all the studies analysed take into account FMCG/FMCD[12] as object of consumption or simply retail stores as place of purchase/consumption. The model has maintained part of the variables that constitute the Verhoef et al. (2009) model (Fig. 5), tailored to the away from home food consumption environment. Other variables are drawn exclusively for this model. In the following paragraphs all the differences and modifications with respect to the Verhoef et al. (2009) model will be explained. All the variables, with the exclusion of age and income, are considered within the consumer's perception.

[12] Fast-moving Consumer Goods include non-durable, packaged and perishable products with a relatively short shelf-life. Examples are toothpaste, cosmetics, coffee, etc. Fast-moving Consumer Durables are durable products, that don't require to be replaced frequently. Examples are I-Pod, microwave, smartphone, etc.

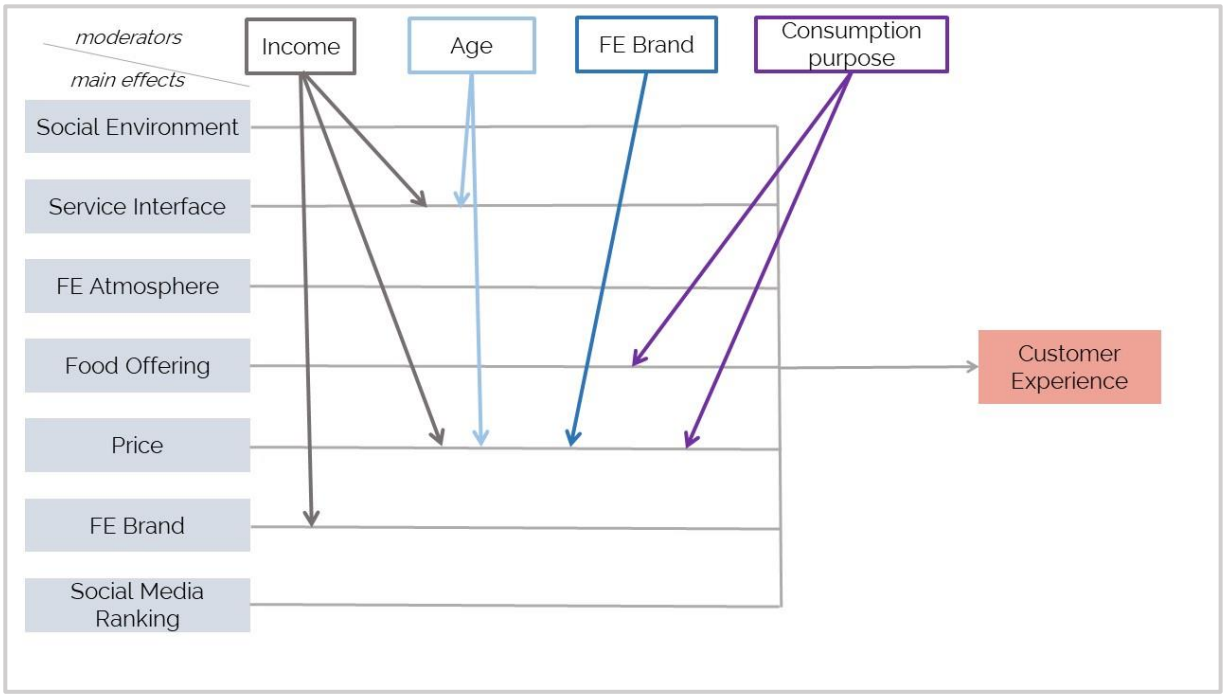

Fig. 6 - The Conceptual Model

2.4.1 The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the model is Customer Experience, which "*depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touchpoints"* (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005; Schmitt, 1999). The last sentence determines the fact that the evaluation of the customer experience given by the consumer is affected by all the stages before and after consumption, as long as they take place in contact with the company. Taking into account the food consumption experience in a restaurant, that is the away from home major example, the stages to consider that affect the expectations are the ones from the selection of the FE, to the payment of the bill at the counter. It's important to specify that this model will not be tested on limited-service restaurant experiences, given the minor complexity of this type of experience, which involves in less stages and less elements (no table service, limited menu, payment before consumption sometimes at automatic cashiers).

Another characteristic of the customer experience emerged from the literature analysis, is that it is subjective and personal. Every consumer is affected in a different measure by all the

independent variables. The aim of the present study is not to dig into customers' profound and psychological/emotional reasons of why they are affected by the variables in a certain way, although it's to observe how and to what extent their customer experience is affected by the selected variables.

2.4.2 The Independent Variables

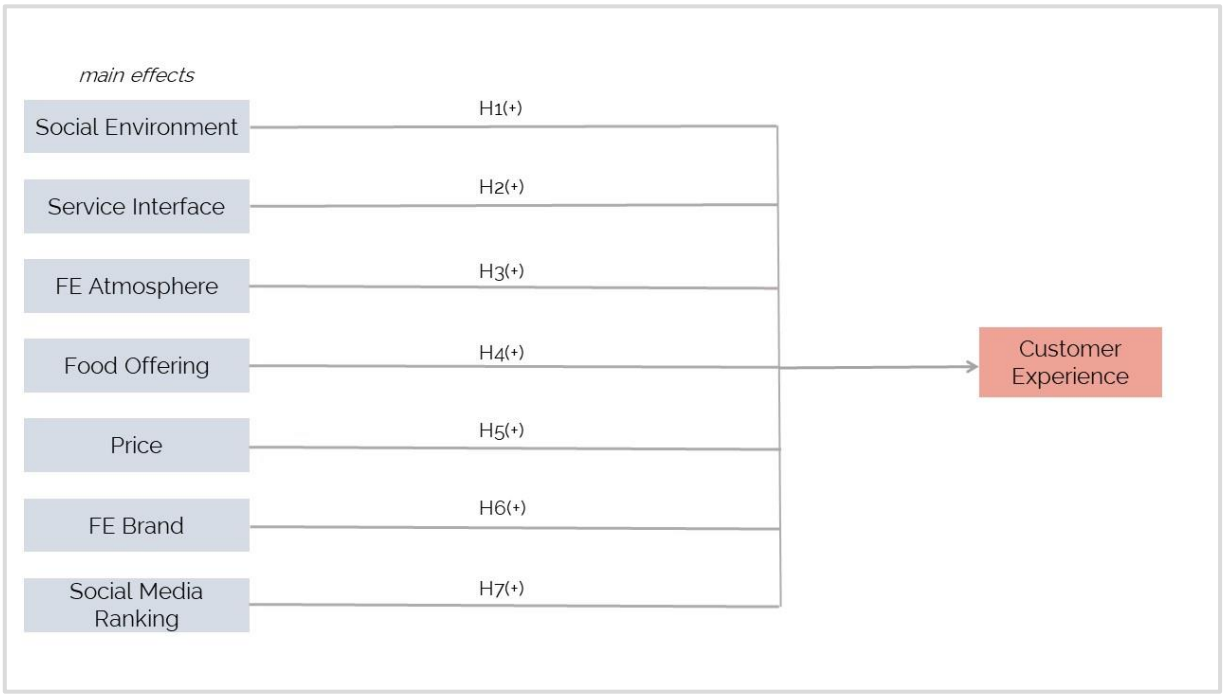

Fig. 7 - The Conceptual Model, Independent Variables Effects

The main effects of the model are quite self-evident and are the transposition of the Verhoef et al. (2009) customer experience model to the away from home food consumption context.

The first three independent variables, *social environment*, *service interface* and *FE atmosphere*, are drawn from the Verhoef et al. (2009) model, without implementing important modifications. The first IV[13] represents the perceived compatibility between the consumer and the other fellow customers inside the restaurant. The second IV represents the perceived quality of the service inside the restaurant. It involves in the evaluation of the timing and staff expertise aspects. The

[13] Independent variable.

third IV represents the perception of the environmental cues of the restaurant. Basically, the exterior pleasantness of the FE and the overall atmosphere judgement.

Food offering indicates the evaluation given by the consumer of the food & beverage products consumed at the restaurant. It substitutes the Verhoef et al. (2009) *assortment* variable, which fails to fit the restaurant environment, given the fact that it comprehends aspects like the width and length of the store offering. These latter aspects are not critical factors in the away from home environment, in which, actually, the FE operators tend to hide the brands to preserve e sense of home-made meals.

Price represents the perceived level of convenience of the price paid by the consumer for the experience at the restaurant. It is perceived in relation to the other elements of the offering, in fact, it involves in the judgement of the convenience and fairness of the price and, as a consequence, in the value for money perception.

FE Brand stands for the perceived prestige of the restaurant. It's not different by the *retail brand* variable employed in the Verhoef et al. (2009) model. The difference is that the retail market, remaining in the food consumption context, is dominated by large players (grocery stores like Coop, Carrefour, Conad, etc.) with a high concentration of the market shares and, as a consequence, a high level of brand awareness and brand loyalty. In contrast, the away from home channel is very fragmented and comprehends 329.787[14] units of FE restaurants.

Social media ranking indicates the willingness of consumers to decide to go to a certain restaurant after seeing the restaurant rating on specialized websites (E.g. TripAdvisor) or social networks. It measures to what extent consumers are affected by eWOM[15].

The variable '*customer experience in alternative channels*', a component of the Verhoef et al. (2009) model, has been excluded from the present model because it doesn't fit properly the away from home environment. While e-commerce really constitutes an alternative channel in the retail environment (E.g. Amazon Pantry), it doesn't apply to the away from home consumption, where the food consumption made via food-delivery websites (E.g. Just Eat) firstly it's to

[14] FIPE. (2017). Rapporto annuale ristorazione 2017.
[15] Electronic word-of-mouth

consider at home and not away from home consumption, secondly it represents a consumption style that hasn't yet found a clear classification in literature.

Following the delineation of each IV, these different assumptions can be made:

H1: The higher is the perception of social environment by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H2: The higher is the perception of service interface by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H3: The higher is the perception of FE atmosphere by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H4: The higher is the perception of food offering by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H5: The higher is the perception of price by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H6: The higher is the perception of FE brand by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H7: The higher is the perception of Social Media Ranking by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.

2.4.3 Moderating Effects

The model comprehends four moderators that influence the effect of the IVs on customer experience. These variables are: *age*; *income*; *FE brand*; *consumption purpose*. The first two moderators are demographic variables.

In this study, age is supposed to moderate the effect of the perceived service quality and perceived price on customer experience (Fig. 8). The younger is the consumer, the less will be the weight of service interface and the higher the weight of the price on the evaluation of the customer experience. These assumptions are made considering the age as a proxy of the expertise of consumers for what concerns fine-dining and restaurant culture. The more a consumer has made experiences with restaurants, the more is his capacity to evaluate the service and the value for money of a restaurant experience.

Income is supposed to moderate the effects of the perceived restaurant brand prestige, price and service on customer experience (Fig. 9). The higher the consumer's income, the higher the weight of the perceived brand prestige and the less the weight of price will be on customer experience. These assumptions are made upon the study conducted by Thorstein Veblen (1899) which suggests that the public consumption of prestige brands is used by people to make signals about their status and wealth, and the price, expensive by normal standards, enhances the value of such a signal. Given that, consumers with a high income are supposed to give great value to the restaurant brand in order to communicate their status and wealth and, consequently, not much weight to the value for money on the evaluation of the customer experience.

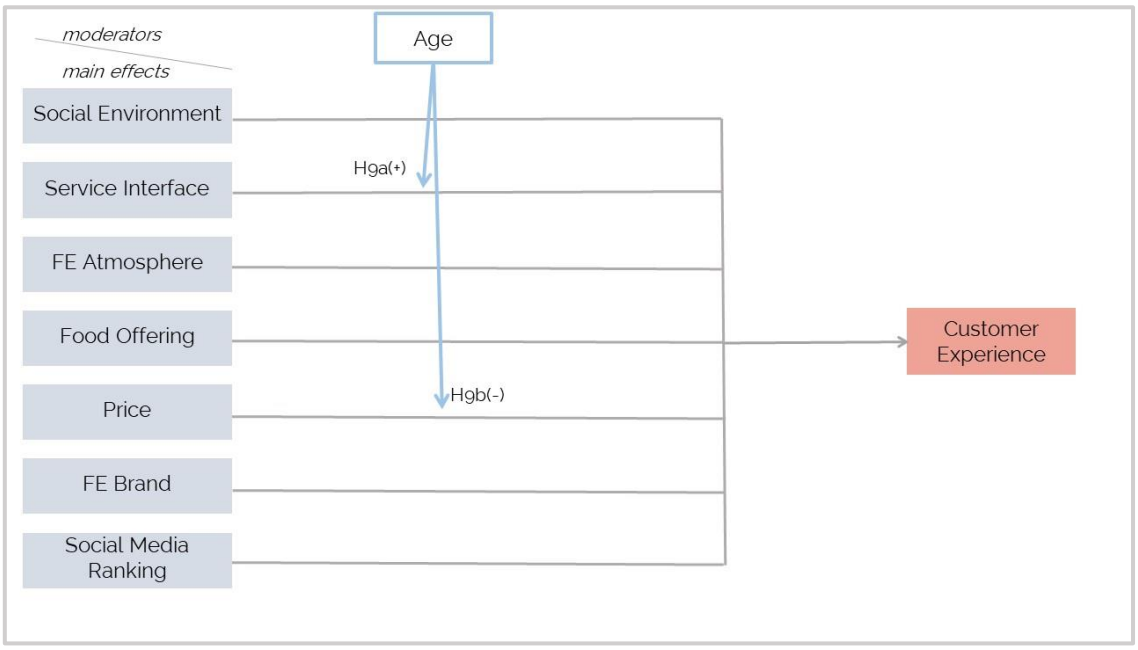

Fig. 8 - The Conceptual Model – Age Moderating Effects

The third moderator, *FE brand*, represents the perceived brand prestige of the restaurant by the consumer, and exercise both a direct and indirect effects to customer experience (Fig. 10).

Brand prestige is supposed to reduce the incidence of price on the evaluation of the customer experience, as its perception increase. This assumption is linked to the Veblen theory that accounts also for the income moderating effects, as explained above. In this case, as the brand prestige constitutes a signal of the wealth and status, and a higher price supports this signal, for

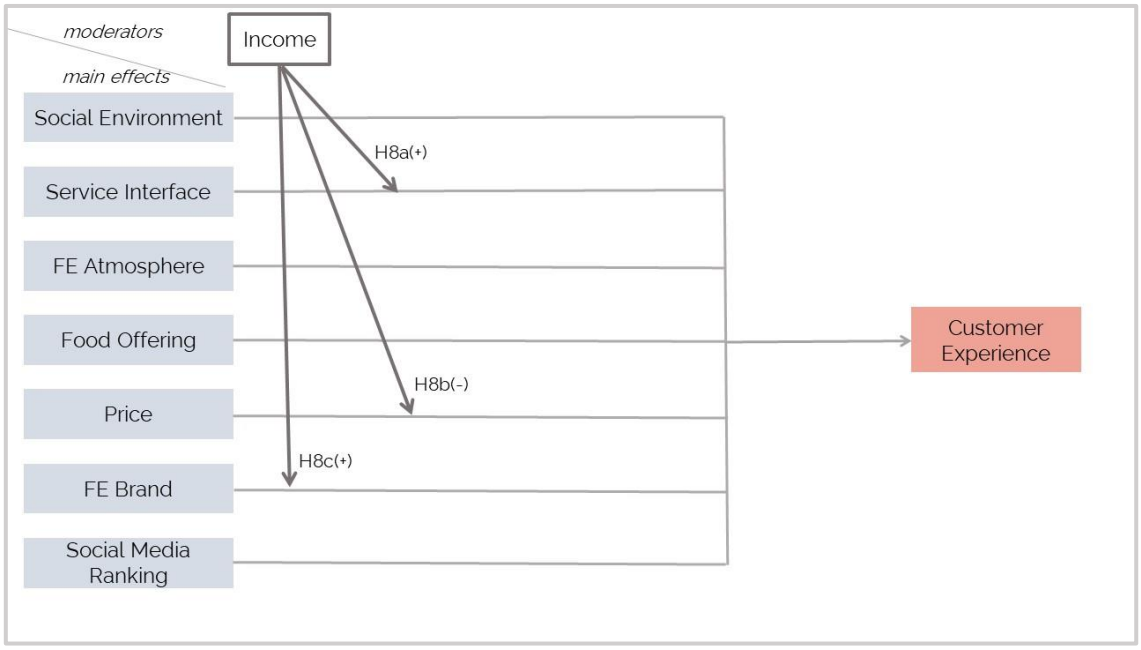

Fig. 9 - The Conceptual Model – Income moderating effects.

a higher perception of the restaurant brand prestige, a smaller importance will be given to the value for money component.

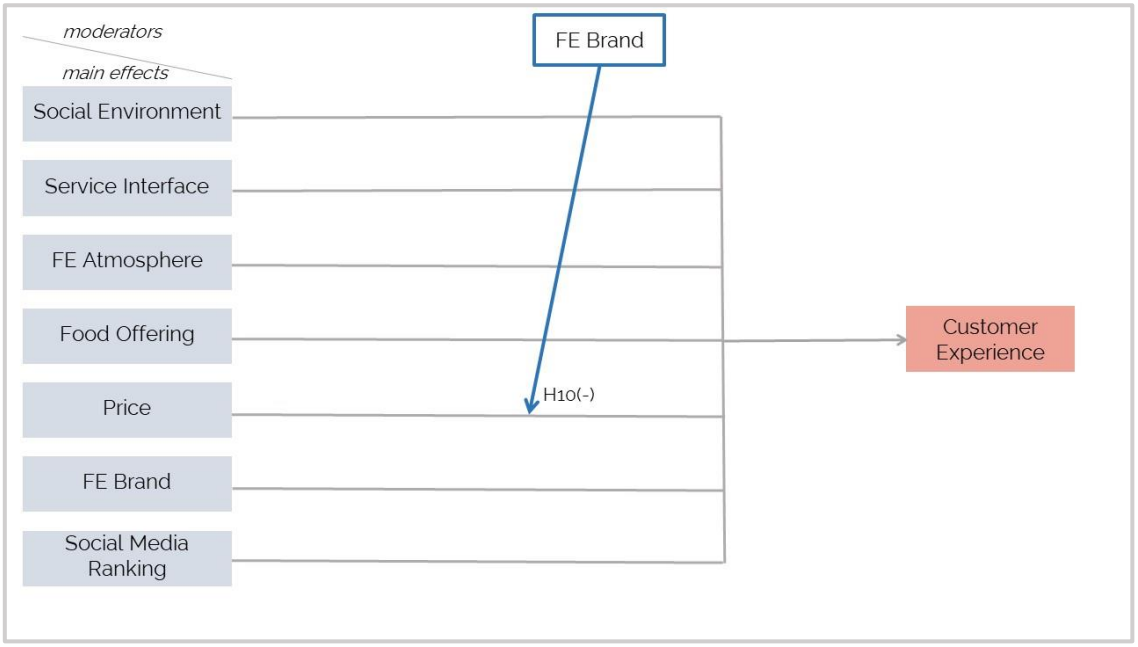

Fig. 10 The Conceptual Model – FE Brand moderating effect.

The last moderator is *consumption purpose* (Fig. 11), which represents the attitudinal level of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure and visceral eating pleasure. As previously said, the epicurean eating pleasure is defined as an enduring pleasure *"derived from the aesthetic appreciation of the sensory and symbolic value of the food"* (Cornil & Chandon, 2016), and is opposed to the visceral eating pleasure, a short-lived hedonic pleasure triggered by visceral impulses such as hunger, internal emotional urges or external cues.

The extant literature regarding this field of study, has analysed the various sources of the visceral pleasure (Alba, Williams, 2013), and the connection between the two kind of eating pleasures (visceral and epicurean) with the consumption styles, in particular with the portion's size preferences and the tendency to adopt healthy food consumption behaviors (Cornil & Chandon, 2016). In the present study will be observed the difference between the way consumers driven by visceral eating pleasure or epicurean eating pleasure are affected by the IVs for their customer experience evaluation. In particular, with respect to food offering, that measures the perceived quality of the food, and price, which measures the perceived convenience of price paid for the experience. The assumptions, given the results of the Cornil & Chandon (2016) study, which proves consumers affected by epicurean eating pleasure tendency are more incline to prefer an overall healthy consumption style, are that the effect of food quality on the evaluation

of the customer experience increases, as the consumer has a higher tendency to seek epicurean eating pleasure. On the other hand, consumers that tend to experiment more frequently epicurean eating pleasure, are supposed to give more importance to the value for money, with respect to consumers with a higher tendency to experiment visceral eating pleasure, on the evaluation of customer experience.

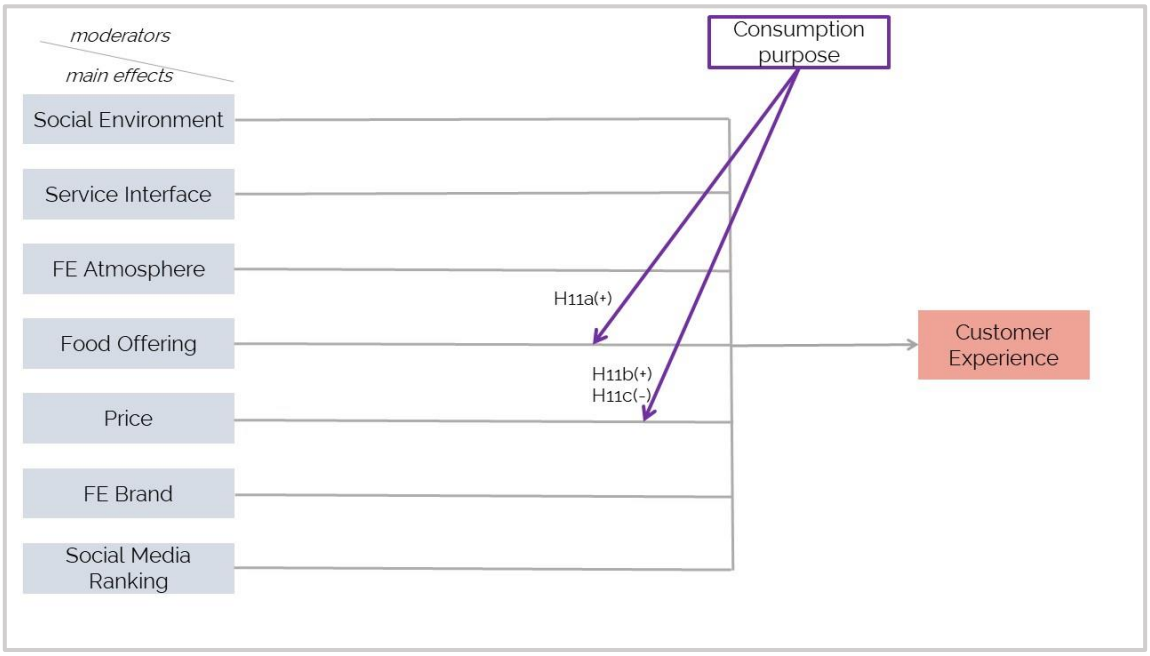

Fig. 11 The Conceptual Model – Consumption Purpose moderating effects.

Following the delineation of each moderator, these different assumptions can be made:

H8a: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.

H8b: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the income increases.

H8c: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of FE brand and customer experience. The effect of FE brand on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.

H9a: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the age increases.

H9b: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the age increases.

H10: FE brand has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the FE brand increases.

H11a: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of food offering and customer experience. The effect of food offering on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.

H11b: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.

H11c: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the tendency of the consumer to seek visceral eating pleasure increases.

3 Methodology

In this chapter will be illustrated the research question, the selected type of research methodology, the scales chosen to measure the various constructs of the model, the validity and reliability test and the hypothesis testing.

3.1 Research Type

The main research question is:

> *How do the different elements of the offering and personal attitudinal characteristics of the consumers affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?*

Sub questions:

- How do the different components of the offering (social environment, service interface, atmosphere, food offering, price, brand prestige, eWOM) affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?
- How do consumer's characteristics (age, income, consumption purpose) moderate the effect of the components of the offering on the evaluation of customer experience?
- How does brand prestige moderate the effect of price on the evaluation of customer experience?

Given these research questions, the study of this thesis was structured following a quantitative approach, built with a web-based survey conducted in Italy, hence, using primary data.

The model was tested in reference to one consumption occasion and to a restricted types of store formats. The consumption occasion is the dinner. This choice is motivated by the level of complexity of this type of occasion with respect to the others (breakfast, lunch). Besides that, the dinner has more chances to encompass both utilitarian and hedonic needs. The store formats

under analysis are the full-service ones. This choice is motivated by the fact that these types of foodservice establishments comprehends in their offering all the constructs belonging to the model. Limited-service restaurants like fast-food solutions don't provide for table service, orders and payment are usually executed at automatic counters and cashiers. Take-away and on-the-go solutions (e.g. Subway) don't provide for the consumption inside the FE, so their offering lack of the atmosphere and social compatibility elements. The process continued with statistical analysis of the collected primary data, to investigate the formulated hypotheses.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The data has been collected by the administration of a web-based survey, released via e-mail, via private messages and on the main social platforms (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn), to Italian respondents or non-Italian respondents based in Italy.

3.2.1 The Survey

The survey was developed on Qualtrics and was made available in two languages: English and Italian.

The survey was divided into three sections, introduced by an initial message about privacy information (all the data will be recorded anonymously) and purpose of the survey (scientific research).

The first section started with the invite to respondents to review the last experience had in a full-service restaurant, by answering the following questions. The respondents were asked to evaluate the different elements of the offering contained in the model, in reference to the restaurant experience: social environment; service interface; FE atmosphere; food offering; price; FE brand. Then, they were asked to evaluate the customer experience had at the restaurant and, finally, to specify the purpose of the dinner-out in terms of pleasure vs duty and satisfaction of

an appetite need vs desire to make a gastronomic experience. The last questions were intended to classify the nature of the consumption experience as epicurean or visceral.

In the second section, respondents were asked to answer to questions about their personal relationship with food consumption. The first sequence of questions was intended to individuate the tendency of respondents to seek epicurean eating pleasure, while having a food consumption experience. Similarly, the second sequence was done to individuate the tendency of respondents to seek visceral eating pleasure, while having a food consumption experience. Finally, they were asked to specify if they follow a special diet.

The last section was aimed to gather demographic data about respondents. The questions are about age, gender, income and nationality information.

The respondents were then thanked for the time dedicated to the questionnaire compilation.

3.2.2 The Scales

Construct	Reference	Scale	Scale type
Dependent Variable			
Customer experience	Domenge & Arciniega (2015)	Q1: How likely are you to return to the restaurant? Q2: How likely are you to recommend the restaurant to a relative or a friend? Q3: How likely are you to organize a special event at the restaurant?	7-point Likert scale, ranging from extremely likely to extremely unlikely
Independent Variables/Moderators			
Social environment	Cedric Hsi-Jui Wu (2007)	Q1: Globally speaking, I liked the fellow customers inside the restaurant	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree

Service interface	Domenge & Arciniega (2015)	Q1: How satisfied are you with the promptness of the service?	7-point Likert scale, ranging from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied
FE atmosphere	Grewal et al. (2003)	Q1: The restaurant was a pleasant place to have dinner Q2: The restaurant had a pleasant atmosphere Q3: The restaurant was attractive	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree
Food offering	Baek et al. (2010)	Q1: The quality of the food was very high	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree
FE brand	Baek et al. (2010)	Q1: This restaurant is very prestigious Q2: This restaurant has high status Q3: This restaurant is very upscale	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree
Price	Petrick (2002)	Q1: The dinner had at the restaurant was a good by Q2: The dinner had at the restaurant was worthy for money Q3: The dinner had at the restaurant was fairly priced Q4: The dinner had at the restaurant was reasonably priced Q5: The dinner had at the restaurant was economical Q6: The dinner had at the restaurant appeared to be a good bargain	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree
Social media ranking	Ladhari & Michaud (2015)	In general, after having read the reviews of a restaurant on a specialized website or on a social net-work… Q1: I can say if I like the restaurant Q2: I decide whether to go or not to the restaurant	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree

Consumption purpose – Epicurean eating pleasure	Cornil & Chandon (2016)	Q1: If I try, I can clearly and easily imagine the taste of many dishes Q2: My friends say that I am a foodie Q3: Cooking is a major form of art, similar to music or painting Q4: I like to discuss the taste of food with my friends Q5: There is a lot of beauty in food Q6: I can easily find the words to describe the taste of many foods Q7: More than other people, I value the look, the smell, the taste, the texture in mouth of foods	7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree
Consumption purpose – Visceral eating pleasure	Van Strien et al. (1986)	Q1: If food tastes good to you, do you eat more than usual? Q2: If food smells and looks good to you, do you eat more than usual? Q3: If you see or smell something delicious, do you have the desire to eat it? Q4: If you have something delicious to eat, do you eat it straight away? Q5: If you walk past the baker, do you have the desire to buy something delicious? Q6: If you walk past a snack-bar or a cafe, do you have the desire to buy something delicious? Q7: If you see others eating, do you also have the desire to eat? Q8: Can you resist eating delicious foods? Q9: Do you eat more than usual when you see other eating?	7-point Likert scale, ranging from always to never

		Q10: When preparing a meal, are you incline to eat something?	
Age			Continuous
Gender			Dummy (male/female)
Income		Less than €15.000 From €15.001 to €28.000 From €28.001 to €55.000 From €55.001 to €75.000 More than €75.000	Interval
Other variables			
Nationality			Categorical
Store format	FIPE (2017)	Base restaurant Fine-dining restaurant Pizzeria Trattoria	Categorical
Diet		Q1: Do you follow a special diet? (vegan, gluten-free, protein-based, etc.)	Dummy (yes/no)
Type of experience/1		Q1: Why did you decided to have dinner at the restaurant?	Dummy (to satisfy an appetite need/to make a gastronomic experience)
Type of experience/2		Q1: What was the purpose of the dinner-out?	Dummy (pleasure/duty)

Tab. 3 – The Scales

Respondents were initially asked to select the store format where they have experienced the dinner. The choices were: base-restaurant; fine-dining restaurant; pizzeria; trattoria. This segmentation was made by FIPE in the 2017 report (Appendix 1).

For this analysis, to measure the perception of *social environment*, the global evaluation of fellow customers scale by Cedric Hsi-Jui Wu (2007) was employed. The author analysed how customer-to-customer interaction and customer homogeneity impact on customer satisfaction in the tourism sector. One item was used to measure the evaluation of fellow customers. The respondents were asked to agree with the phrase ‘‘globally speaking, I like the fellow customers in our tourist group’’. The statement was adapted to the restaurant context as shown in the questionnaire and was measured with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘Strongly agree’ – ‘Strongly disagree’.

To measure the perception of *service interface,* a multi-item scale developed by Domenge and Arciniega (2015) measuring perceived quality service, was employed. In this study, the authors aimed to develop a short questionnaire to measure perceived service quality in foodservice establishments. Participants where asked: “How satisfied are you with the following aspects?”.

The scale is composed by three items: “The promptness of the service”; “The attention received from the staff”; “The willingness of the employees to provide you with personalized attention” and it was reported in the questionnaire without any modifications, scored by a 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘Extremely satisfied’ - ‘Extremely dissatisfied’.

FE atmosphere was measured using a multi-item scale measuring store atmosphere evaluation developed by Grewal et al. (2003)[16] for a study analysing the effects of wait expectations and store atmosphere evaluations on patronage intentions, in service-intensive retail stores. Respondents were asked to agree with the three statements: “The store would be a pleasant place to shop”; “The store had a pleasing atmosphere”; “The store was attractive”, with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘Strongly agree’ – ‘Strongly disagree’. The items were adapted to the restaurant context as shown in the Tab. 3.

Food offering and *FE brand* were both measured using two multi-item scales taken from the Baek et al. (2010) study, which explores how brand credibility and brand prestige affect brand purchase intention.

[16] The scales were developed by the authors taking into account a study conducted by Baker et al. (1994).

Food offering was measured by the perceived quality scale, whose item is: "The quality of this brand is very high", where 'brand' was replaced by 'food', measured with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'Strongly agree' – 'Strongly disagree', while FE brand was measured using the brand prestige multi-item scale, whose items are: "This brand is very prestigious"; "This brand has high status"; "This brand is very upscale", were 'brand' was replaced with 'restaurant', measured with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'Strongly agree' – 'Strongly disagree'.

To measure *price* perception, a multi-item scale measuring the monetary price perception, from a study aimed to develop a multi-dimensional scale for measuring the perceived value of a service (Petrick, 2002), was selected. The items of the scale, relative to the cruise on board the vessel (then replaced with the dinner had at the restaurant) are: "is a good buy"; "is worth the money"; "is fairly priced"; "is reasonably priced"; "is economical"; "appears to be a good bargain". The scale was operationalized by asking participants to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'.

Social media ranking was measured using a scale taken from a study observing the eWOM effects on hotel booking intentions (Ladhari, Michaud, 2015). The scale's items, measuring the attitudes of consumers toward the hotel, are: "After having read the reviews and visited the hotel website, I can say that I like this hotel"; "After having read the reviews and visited the hotel website, I would book a room in it" and they have been modified to fit the restaurant context. The evaluation of the items was done by mean of a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'.

Consumption purpose was measured by two different multi-item scales, one accounting for the epicurean eating pleasure tendency and another one accounting for the visceral eating pleasure tendency. Both the scales were taken from the study conducted by Cornil & Chandon (2016)[17], already analysed in the chapter 2.2 "The Antecedents of Food Consumption".

The epicurean eating pleasure tendency scale contains the following items: "If I try, I can clearly and easily imagine the taste of many dishes"; "My friends say that I am a foodie"; "Cooking is a major form of art, similar to music or painting"; "I like to discuss the taste of food with my friends"; "There is a lot of beauty in food"; "I can easily find the words to describe the taste of

[17] The authors employed the external eating scale developed by Van Strien et al. (1986) for the study DEBQ to measure the visceral eating pleasure tendency.

many foods"; "More than other people, I value the look, the smell, the taste, the texture in mouth of foods". The respondents were asked to rate the statements basing on the level of agreement by mean of a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'Strongly agree' – 'Strongly disagree'.

The visceral eating pleasure tendency scale contains the following items: "If food tastes good to you, do you eat more than usual?"; "If food smells and looks good, do you eat more than usual?"; "If you see or smell something delicious, do you have a desire to eat it?"; "If you have something delicious to eat, do you eat it straight away?"; "If you walk past the baker do you have the desire to buy something delicious?"; "If you walk past a snackbar or a cafe, do you have the desire to buy something delicious?"; "If you see others eating, do you also have the desire to eat?"; "Can you resist eating delicious foods?"; "Do you eat more than usual, when you see others eating?"; "When preparing a meal are you inclined to eat something?". The respondents were asked to answer with the level of frequency they face the previous situations by mean of a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'Always' – 'Never'.

Customer experience was measured, as well as *service interface,* by a scale developed by Domenge and Arciniega (2015). The scale was developed by the authors for measuring behavioral intentions. The three items employed for operationalizing this construct are: "how likely are you to return to (name of the restaurant)?"; "how likely are you to recommend (name of the restaurant) to a relative or friend?"; "how likely are you to organize a special event in (name of the restaurant)?". This scale was measured with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'Extremely likely' – 'Extremely unlikely'.

Many studies, for instance the one conducted by Verhoef et al. (2009), employed to measure customer experience, the scale 'store patronage intensions' developed by Baker et al. (2002). The last scale was not chosen for the present study because it doesn't fit the restaurant context, given the items are: "The likelihood that I would shop in this store is very high"; "I would be willing to buy merchandise at this store"; "I would be willing to recommend this store to my friends". The modifications to these scales to fit the study would have been too drastic, with the risk of compromising the external validity of the scale. In contrast, the selected scale is very similar to the store patronage intentions one but has a better fit with the context under study.

To classify the type of experience, respondents were asked to answer the question: “why did you decided to have dinner at the restaurant?” with the following answers: 1) “pleasure”, “duty”; 2) “to satisfy an appetite need”, “to make a gastronomic experience”.

For what concerns demographic variables, the relative scales chosen are: less than €15.000, from €15.001 to €28.000, from €28.001 to €55.000, from €55.001 to €75.000 or more than €75.000 for the income; male or female for the gender. Age and nationality were to be inserted manually by the respondents.

3.3 Sampling Method and Sample Size

The study of this thesis used non-probability sampling.

In particular, given the chosen data collection method, based on the administration of a web-based survey, which was be released via email, via private messages and on the main social platforms, the study resorted to convenience sampling and snowball sampling, asking respondents to spread the questionnaire as much as possible by making word of mouth.

In order to obtain results that are the most attributable to the world population as possible, this study aimed to obtain at least 250 responses.

3.4 Reliability and Validity Tests

The research uses multi-item scales for variables, so the reliability and the validity have been tested.

After the data cleaning process, a Factor Analysis to tests the validity of the scales has been run, even if these were all taken from the previous literature and therefore pre-validated.

A preliminary reliability analysis has been performed using the Cronbach’s alpha test.

3.5 Hypothesis Testing

This thesis aims to study what is the effect of the different elements of the offering and personal characteristics of the consumers, on the customer experience evaluation.

Customer experience is the only dependent variable, while the independent variables are: social environment; service interface; FE atmosphere; food offering; FE brand; price and Social media ranking. This study also foresees to test different moderating effects. The moderators are: age; income; FE brand and consumption purpose.

In order to test the above-mentioned effects, given the dependent variable is a metric variable and there are more than one independent variables, it was considered appropriate to proceed with a multiple regression analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 265 usable observations were collected through the online survey.

The gender of the sample is distributed as follow: females constituted 60.75% of the sample, with 161 responses and males constituted 39.25% of the sample, with 104 responses. The age of the respondents varied from 11 to 68 years. It was decided to drop the observations for age < 18 to preserve reliability of the data. Following that, a remaining sample of 265 observations has been adopted (10 observations has been deleted from an initial sample of 275 observations). The mean age is 42 years.

The reported income of the respondents is distributed as follow: 40.38% in the €28,001– €55,000 range; 23.40% in the €15,001– €28,000 range; 19.62% in the less than €15.000 range; 9.43% in the €55,001– €75,000 range and 7.17% in the more than €75,000 range. The 15.84 % of the respondents was following a special diet.

The foodservice establishment where the respondents have experienced the dinner they reviewed are classified in the following store formats: 50.18 % base restaurants; 24.15 % pizzeria; 15.47 % trattoria; 10.19 % fine-dining restaurants.

Most of the respondents are settled in Abruzzo (50,56 %) and Lazio (28,67 %).

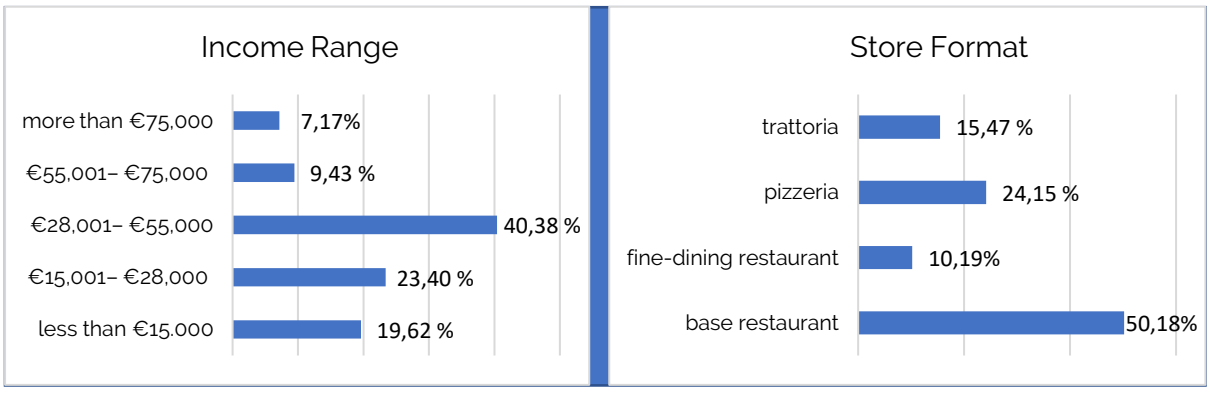

Fig. 12 – Descriptive Variables/1

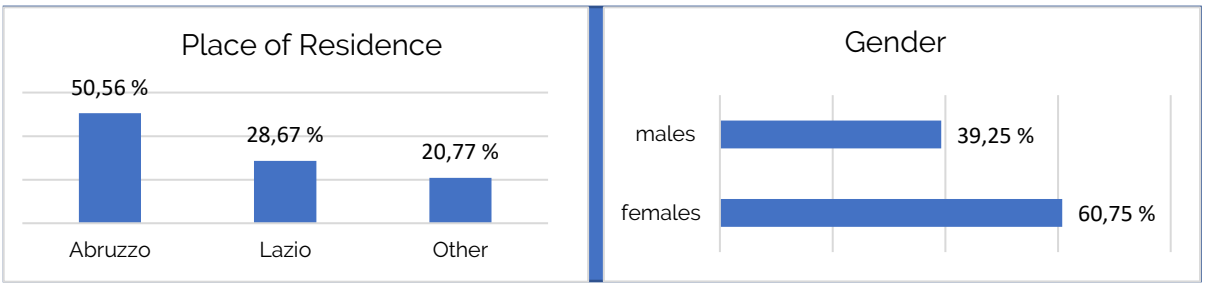

Fig. 13 – Descriptive Variables/2

4.2 Validity and Reliability Tests

In order to verify the validity and reliability of the variables that were measured by multi-item scales, the factor analysis and the Cronbach's alpha test were performed.

The model comprehends eight constructs measured with a multi-item scale. To inspect the construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed, expecting eight factors: service interface; FE atmosphere; price; FE brand; social media ranking; visceral eating pleasure; epicurean eating pleasure and CE.

After a first factor analysis including the items of all the constructs, CE and price resulted to load the same factor. Following, CE, that theoretically is the dependent variable, while price the independent variable, was isolated and analysed apart from the other variables. Another factor analysis was performed excluding CE items (Tab. 4). Seven factors with proper eigenvalues have been obtained. Service interface and FE atmosphere resulted to load on the same factor. Part of the visceral pleasure items (4 out of 10) resulted to load on a factor, while the other part of the visceral pleasure items (6 out of 10) resulted to load on a different factor.

Following the results of the analysis, a new variable called *service atmosphere*, including the items belonging to service interface and the ones belonging to FE atmosphere, was generated. The visceral pleasure variable was split in two different variables, one composed by the items loading on one factor, another one composed by the items loading on the other factor. One revers item resulted to be present on the visceral pleasure 1 scale. It was inverted before performing the multiple regression analysis.

A factor analysis including only the CE items was performed, resulting in one expected factor (Tab. 5).

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
service_1	0,32	0,16	0,07	0,02	-0,09	0,74	-0,02
service_2	0,38	0,20	0,05	0,05	-0,04	0,74	-0,10
service_3	0,35	0,22	0,14	0,08	-0,11	0,63	-0,06
atmosphere_1	0,34	-0,07	0,29	-0,21	0,14	0,61	0,25
atmosphere_2	0,18	-0,05	0,39	-0,27	0,18	0,55	0,35
atmosphere_3	0,25	-0,04	0,59	-0,02	0,11	0,34	0,15
brand_1	0,16	0,06	0,89	-0,04	0,02	0,09	0,10
brand_2	0,15	0,10	0,92	0,05	-0,01	0,09	-0,03
brand_3	0,13	0,11	0,85	0,01	-0,07	0,02	0,01
price_1	0,80	-0,02	0,19	0,02	0,04	0,35	0,01
price_2	0,84	-0,02	0,20	0,04	0,04	0,32	-0,02
price_3	0,90	0,03	0,12	0,04	0,00	0,16	0,04
price_4	0,89	0,03	0,12	0,01	0,03	0,09	0,06
price_5	0,85	0,04	-0,07	-0,02	-0,05	-0,04	0,14
price_6	0,84	0,10	0,16	-0,03	0,05	0,09	0,05
social_media_1	0,07	0,13	0,09	0,18	-0,03	0,05	0,78
social_media_2	0,16	0,15	0,05	0,12	0,11	-0,02	0,79
epicurean_1	0,15	0,43	0,04	-0,09	0,29	0,02	0,22
epicurean_2	0,15	0,66	0,04	0,10	0,07	0,09	0,04
epicurean_3	0,04	0,63	0,12	-0,12	0,20	0,10	-0,03
epicurean_4	0,05	0,75	0,13	0,08	0,05	0,14	0,15
epicurean_5	-0,05	0,75	0,08	0,15	0,07	0,11	0,05
epicurean_6	0,07	0,80	0,09	0,00	0,11	0,11	0,11
epicurean_7	0,00	0,72	0,02	-0,03	0,10	-0,08	0,04
visceral_1	0,09	0,02	0,02	0,16	0,78	0,01	-0,03
visceral_2	-0,01	0,19	-0,03	0,19	0,74	0,05	0,17
visceral_3	0,02	0,21	0,02	0,26	0,72	-0,08	-0,03
visceral_4	0,00	0,19	-0,03	0,40	0,66	0,00	0,04
visceral_5	0,03	-0,03	0,07	0,65	0,36	0,01	0,08
visceral_6	0,01	0,08	-0,02	0,73	0,27	0,00	0,09
visceral_7	0,03	0,04	-0,03	0,69	0,42	-0,10	0,05
visceral_8	0,10	0,21	0,08	-0,44	-0,36	0,08	0,01
visceral_9	0,02	0,10	0,07	0,65	0,05	0,05	0,20
visceral_10	0,09	0,04	-0,04	0,62	0,13	-0,03	0,10

Tab. 4 – Rotated Factor Loadings

Variable	Factor 1

ce_1	0,94
ce_2	0,95
ce_3	0,86

Tab. 5 – Rotated Factor Loadings on Customer Experience

To verify reliability of the scales, a Cronbach's alpha test was performed for each validated construct (Tab. 6):

1. Cronbach's alpha of FE brand scale is equal to 0.90 (very good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. FE brand scale resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
2. Cronbach's alpha of Epicurean pleasure scale is equal to 0.83 (very good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. Epicurean pleasure resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
3. Cronbach's alpha of Visceral pleasure (1) scale is equal to 0.81 (good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. Visceral pleasure (1) resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
4. Cronbach's alpha of Visceral pleasure (2) scale is equal to 0.79 (good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. Visceral pleasure (2) resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
5. Cronbach's alpha of price scale is equal to 0.93 (very good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. Price resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
6. Cronbach's alpha of service atmosphere scale is equal to 0.82 (good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. Service atmosphere resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
7. Cronbach's alpha of CE scale is equal to 0.89 (very good), which is larger than cut-off 0.60. CE resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.
8. Cronbach's alpha of social media ranking scale is equal to 0.64, which is larger than cut-off 0.60. CE resulted to be reliable to use in further analysis by calculating the scale mean.

Item	item-test correlation	item-rest correlation	average in-teritem co-variance	alpha
brand_1	0,92	0,83	1,83	0,86
brand_2	0,94	0,86	1,76	0,83
brand_3	0,90	0,77	1,89	0,91
Test scale			1,83	0,91
epicurean_1	0,58	0,40	0,69	0,83
epicurean_2	0,73	0,58	0,58	0,81
epicurean_3	0,62	0,51	0,70	0,81
epicurean_4	0,78	0,67	0,58	0,79
epicurean_5	0,73	0,64	0,66	0,80
epicurean_6	0,81	0,72	0,58	0,78
epicurean_7	0,70	0,56	0,63	0,80
Test scale			0,63	0,83
visceral_1	0,78	0,62	0,78	0,78
visceral_2	0,83	0,68	0,69	0,75
visceral_3	0,80	0,64	0,73	0,77
visceral_4	0,81	0,63	0,69	0,78
Test scale			0,72	0,82
visceral_5	0,76	0,61	0,77	0,75
visceral_6	0,79	0,67	0,77	0,73
visceral_7	0,80	0,69	0,79	0,73
visceral_8	0,58	0,41	0,97	0,79
visceral_9	0,63	0,46	0,92	0,78
visceral_10	0,64	0,45	0,90	0,78
Test scale			0,85	0,79
price_1	0,87	0,81	1,72	0,93
price_2	0,90	0,86	1,66	0,92
price_3	0,93	0,89	1,61	0,92
price_4	0,90	0,85	1,66	0,92
price_5	0,82	0,73	1,65	0,94
price_6	0,87	0,80	1,62	0,93
Test scale			1,65	0,94
service_in~1	0,86	0,65	1,03	0,78
service_in~2	0,88	0,73	0,97	0,70
service_in~3	0,84	0,65	1,12	0,78
Test scale			1,04	0,82
atmosphere_1	0,76	0,67	0,68	0,79
atmosphere_2	0,72	0,59	0,69	0,81
atmosphere_3	0,65	0,49	0,71	0,82
service_in~1	0,77	0,63	0,60	0,80
service_in~2	0,78	0,66	0,62	0,79
service_in~3	0,74	0,60	0,64	0,80
Test scale			0,65	0,83
ce_1	0,93	0,84	2,37	0,82

ce_2	0,94	0,86	2,23	0,80
ce_3	0,89	0,72	2,31	0,95
Test scale			2,30	0,89

Tab. 6 – Cronbach's Alpha Test Results

Following verification of the validity of the scales used in the study and reliability of the constructs deriving from them, the continuous variables: CE; service atmosphere; brand; social media; price; visceral pleasure (1); visceral pleasure (2); epicurean pleasure were created.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

At first, a multiple regression of all the independent variables on CE without the interactions effects was performed. The F-test rejects the hypothesis that all coefficients are equal to zero ($F(11, 26) = 77.72$, $p < 0.00$). The adjusted R squared is equal to 0.76 hence the 76% of the variability in CE is explained by the independent variables. Overall model fit is good.

A multiple regression including the interaction effects was performed, showing a multicollinearity problem (VIF values are higher than 10 and income, epicurean pleasure, visceral pleasure (1) and visceral pleasure (2) changed sign of the effect). The multicollinearity problem was corrected with the mean-centering of the interactions. Another multiple regression including the mean-centered interactions was performed (Tab. 7). The F-test showed significance of the model rejecting the hypothesis that all the coefficients are zero ($F(21, 25) = 41.44$, $p < 0.00$) and the still have a good fit (adjusted R squared = 0.77), the VIF values were all lower then 10, the signs of the variables are consistent. Multicollinearity problem has been solved. When inspecting the individual regression coefficients, the resulting significant effects were: price ($t = 17.25$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05/2$), service atmosphere ($t = 3.97$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05/2$), brand ($t = 3.00$, $p = 0.003 < 0.05/2$) and the interaction between visceral pleasure (1) and price ($t = -2.33$, $p = 0.021 < 0.05/2$). Summing up, price has a positive effect on CE (when price increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.87 units), service atmosphere has a positive effect on CE (when service atmosphere increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.33 units), brand has a positive effect on CE (when brand increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.13 units). As the regression analysis revealed

a significant moderating effect of the interaction between visceral pleasure 1 and price, a further analysis of the directions was performed to assess the nature of this interaction. By observing that the direction of the price in affecting CE is positive; the direction of visceral pleasure 1 in affecting CE is negative and the direction of the interaction between visceral pleasure 1 and price in affecting CE is negative, it can be said the nature of this moderating effect is buffering (the effect of price on CE decreases of 0,13 units when visceral pleasure (1) increases of 1 unit). To compare the magnitude of the effects, a check of the standardized values (Betas) was carried out, showing that price (beta = 0,72) has a larger effect on CE than service atmosphere (beta = 0,18) and brand (beta = 0,11).

Cust. Experience	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	Beta
income	-0,02	0,05	-0,34	0,73	-0,01
epicurean	0,10	0,07	1,53	0,13	0,06
visceral 1	-0,12	0,07	-1,64	0,10	-0,07
visceral 2	0,09	0,06	1,36	0,17	0,06
age	0,00	0,00	0,27	0,79	0,01
social interface	0,03	0,05	0,70	0,48	0,02
service atmosphere	0,31	0,08	3,63	0,00	0,17
food offering	-0,11	0,06	-1,83	0,07	-0,08
price	0,89	0,05	16,86	0,00	0,74
FE brand	0,12	0,04	2,70	0,01	0,10
social media ranking	0,00	0,05	0,01	0,99	0,00
visceral 1 x price	-0,13	0,05	-2,42	0,02	-0,11
visceral 2 x price	0,04	0,05	0,87	0,39	0,04
epicurean x price	0,08	0,06	1,46	0,15	0,06
epicurean x food	-0,02	0,05	-0,30	0,77	-0,01
income x price	-0,05	0,05	-0,99	0,32	-0,04
income x brand	0,04	0,04	1,23	0,22	0,04
income x serviceatm	-0,05	0,08	-0,71	0,48	-0,03
brand x price	-0,03	0,03	-0,86	0,39	-0,03
age x serviceatm	0,00	0,01	0,61	0,54	0,03
age x price	0,00	0,00	0,14	0,89	0,01
_cons	-1,72	0,53	-3,25	0,00	0,00

Tab. 7 - Multiple Regression Analysis Results

A normality test of the residuals was performed by plotting the residuals of the observed sample against the corresponding residuals of a standard normal distribution N (0,1).

The residuals don’t deviate a lot from the straight line, so it is reasonable to assume that the observed sample comes from a normal distribution (Fig. 14).

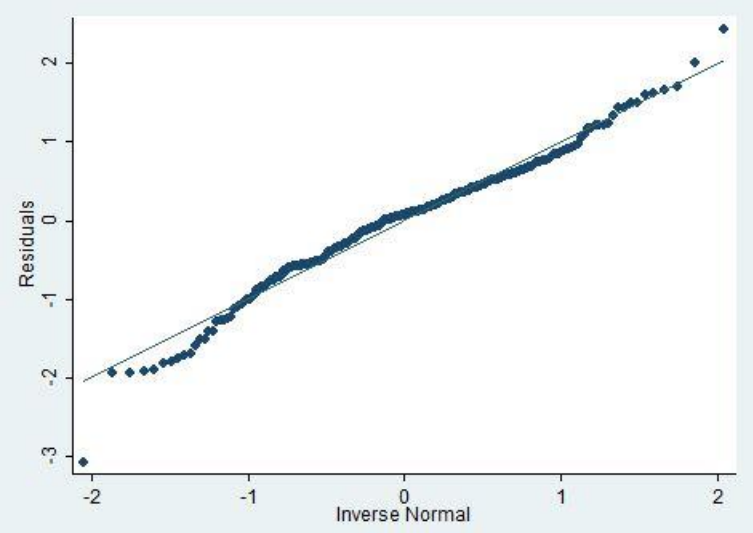

Fig. 14 q-norm plot from Stata

A White's test to check for homoskedasticity of the residuals has been performed. The results showed the variance of the residuals is homogenous (heteroskedasticity hypothesis rejected with p-value = 0.128 > 0.05). Constant variance assumption is validated so we can trust the hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Result
H1: The higher is the perception of social environment by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Do not reject H0. Social environment doesn't exercise a significant effect on customer experience.
Service Interface and FE atmosphere scales resulted to measure only one construct following the factor analysis. A new variable was created named: *service atmosphere* measuring both service and atmosphere perceptions.	
H2: The higher is the perception of service interface by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Reject H0. Service interface exercises a significant positive effect on customer experience.
H3: The higher is the perception of FE atmosphere by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Reject H0. Atmosphere exercises a significant positive effect on customer experience.
H4: The higher is the perception of food offering by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Do not reject H0. Food offering doesn't exercise a significant effect on customer experience.
H5: The higher is the perception of price by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Reject H0. Price (value for money) exercises a significant positive effect on customer experience.

H6: The higher is the perception of FE brand by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Reject H0. FE brand (brand prestige) exercises a significant positive effect on customer experience.
H7: The higher is the perception of Social Media Ranking by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.	Do not reject H0. Social Media Ranking doesn't exercise a significant effect on customer experience.
H8a: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.	Do not reject H0. Income doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between service interface and customer experience.
H8b: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the income increases.	Do not reject H0. Income doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between price and customer experience.
H8c: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of FE brand and customer experience. The effect of FE brand on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.	Do not reject H0. Income doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between FE brand and customer experience.
H9a: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the age increases.	Do not reject H0. Age doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between service interface and customer experience.
H9b: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the age increases.	Do not reject H0. Age doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between price and customer experience.
H10: FE brand has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the FE brand increases.	Do not reject H0. FE brand doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between price and customer experience.
H11a: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of food offering and customer experience. The effect of food offering on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.	Do not reject H0. Consumption purpose doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between food offering and customer experience. That is, as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases, the effect of food offering on customer experience doesn't change significantly.

H11b: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.	Do not reject H0. Consumption purpose doesn't exercise a significant moderating effect between price and customer experience. That is, as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases, the effect of price on customer experience doesn't change significantly.
Following the factor analysis, the first three items of the visceral eating scale resulted to load on one factor, while the last six items of the scale resulted to load on another factor. As a consequence, two new variables have been created: visceral pleasure (1); visceral pleasure (2).	
H11c: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the tendency of the consumer to seek visceral eating pleasure increases.	Reject H0. Consumption purpose exercise a significant moderating buffering effect between price and customer experience. That is, as the tendency of the consumer to seek visceral eating pleasure increases, the effect of price on customer experience decreases.

Tab. 8 – Hypothesis Testing Results

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions and Discussions

Following the Factor Analysis, even if the multi-item scales implied for the analysis were all pre-validated scales taken from reliable studies, the external eating scale (van Strien, Frijters, Bergers, & Defares, 1986), measuring visceral eating pleasure tendency, resulted to measure two different variables. Two variables comprehending respectively the first four items of the scale (Visceral 1) and the last six items of the scale (Visceral 2) have been generated.

The first four items are:

1) If food tastes good to you, do you eat more than usual?
2) If food smells and looks good to you, do you eat more than usual?
3) If you see or smell something delicious, do you have the desire to eat it?
4) If you have something delicious to eat, do you eat it straight away?

The last six items are:

5) If you walk past the baker, do you have the desire to buy something delicious?
6) you walk past a snack-bar or a cafe, do you have the desire to buy something delicious?
7) If you see others eating, do you also have the desire to eat?
8) Can you resist eating delicious foods?
9) Do you eat more than usual when you see other eating?
10) When preparing a meal, are you incline to eat something?

By observing the different groups of items and trying to find out a difference, it can be said that the first group is more linked to the relation between pure sensorial aspects of food and the consumer (e.g. if you see or smell something delicious, etc.), while the second group is linked to behavioral aspects executed by the consumer himself (e.g. when preparing a meal, if you walk past the baker, etc.) when experiencing situations that deal with food.

Service interface and FE atmosphere items, resulted to load the same factor by the factor analysis. Following that, a single variable named Service Atmosphere, which measures both service perceptions and restaurant atmosphere perceptions, was created.

It's very likely that these 'anomalies' resulted from the factor analysis, are attributable to the non-probability sampling method adopted for the data collection, that limited the representativeness of the sample, causing this unexpected outcome for what concern the validation of the scales (split of the visceral scale, merge of the atmosphere and service scales to represent one variable).

The hypothesis testing by mean of the multiple regression analysis, showed the variables affecting significantly the customer experience assessment are: the perceived level of value for money and the convenience of the price deal; the perceived brand prestige of the foodservice establishment and, jointly, the perceived quality of the service and the perceived atmosphere of the foodservice establishment. In particular, the price variable was the one with the greater effect in terms of magnitude (by looking at the Betas of the regression analysis).

Amongst the moderators, the visceral eating pleasure measuring the response to sensorial aspects of food (visceral pleasure 1) resulted to be the only variable to affect with significance the relationship between price perceptions and customer experience assessment. Specifically, as the tendency of the consumer to indulge visceral impulses increases, the effect of the value for money perception on customer experience decreases. This can be justified considering that consumers incline to satisfy visceral pleasure by having a consumption experience in a restaurant, derive satisfaction mainly by the food consumption, and less by the other component of the experience (including price).

An interesting finding that can be observed with regard to the Gentile et al. model (2007), is that the results of their study showed a predominance of the sensorial dimension upon the others (emotional; cognitive; pragmatic; lifestyle; relational) in determining the customer experience.

The analysis of the present thesis demonstrates a similar finding: the effects of visceral pleasure 1, that is the visceral pleasure more connected with the sensorial aspects of food, resulted to be significant in moderating the effect of price on customer experience. On the contrary, the

visceral pleasure accounting for less sensorial aspects, visceral pleasure 2, didn't resulted to be significant in moderating the relationship between price and customer experience.

The other variables considered in the model resulted to have no significant effect on customer experience assessment.

Specifically, social environment, which represents the level of compatibility between the consumer and the fellow customers inside the restaurant; food offering, accounting for the overall quality level of food consumed at the restaurant and social media ranking, which represents the level of influence exercised by the web-based rankings on the consumers' expectations, resulted to have no significant effect on the customer experience assessment.

Income, age, perceived brand prestige and the tendency of consumers to seek for epicurean eating pleasure, resulted to have no significant moderating effect between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

The resulting output can be resumed in a new model (Fig. 15) composed by one dependent variable, customer experience; three independent variables, service atmosphere, price, brand prestige and one moderator of price on customer experience, consumption purpose, which represents the tendency on consumers to seek for visceral eating pleasure.

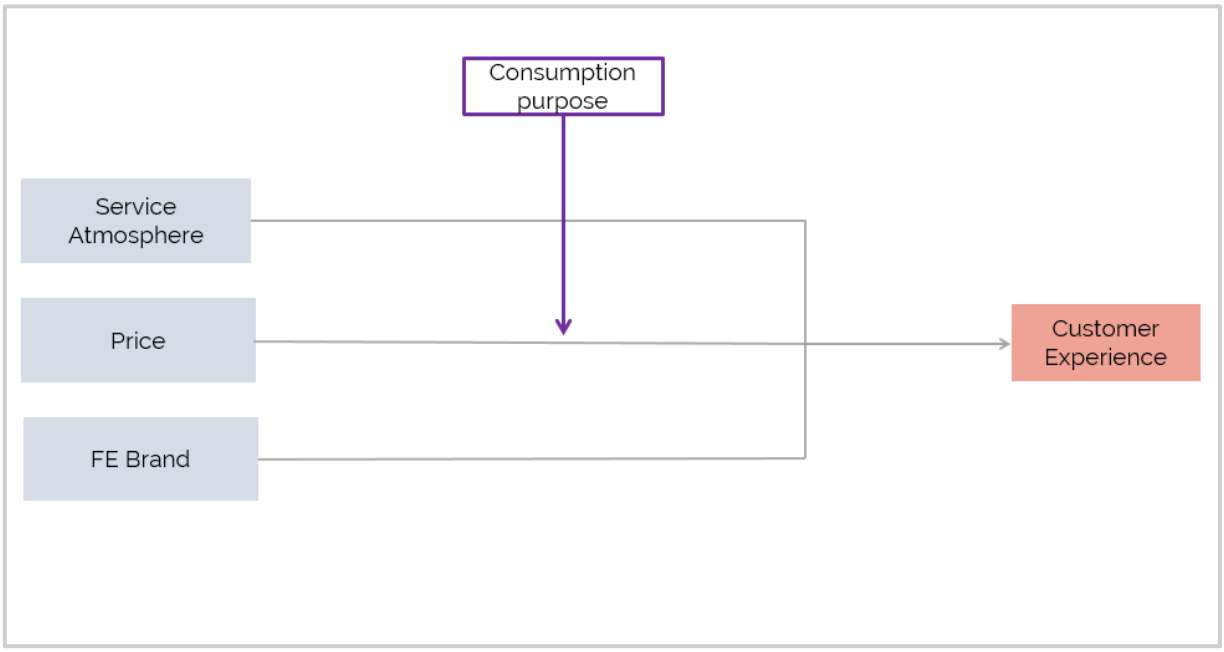

Fig. 15 The Final Model

5.2 Managerial Implications

Following the analysis of the results, it is reasonable to assume that knowing what the drivers of the customer experience in the away from home food consumption context are, could be useful to the management of all the Horeca channel players, from the manufacturer companies to the F&B wholesalers and, finally, to the foodservice establishments.

Knowing that the brand prestige, the service quality jointly to the restaurant atmosphere and the price are the key drivers in order to enhance the customer experience, could be an important information for those foodservice establishment players who are interested in increasing customer satisfaction, in terms of strategy development and resources allocation.

Taking into account the findings about the interaction effect of price and visceral eating pleasure on customer experience, could be also useful to formulate tailored strategies directed to those consumers who tend to seek visceral sensorial eating pleasure (type 1). This target of consumers, more attractive than others because of the lower level of price sensitivity they experiment with respect to customer experience assessment, could be retained by means of specific

strategies aimed at over-exposing the sensorial characteristics of food, to which this target is very sensitive. To make an example, assuming the existence of this moderating effect, a food-service establishment could organize occasional cooking shows or place a staple cooking work-space on sight, where part of the process could be shown to the audience in order to stimulate visceral eating pleasure.

Furthermore, with regard to the Horeca channel, there is lack of the magnitude of data and information that are available for the retail market, whose dynamics are constantly under study. If, in the future, will be possible to test the model on a more representative sample and expand the research focusing on the specific components of the model more in depth, the results would be considerably useful to the away from home F&B industry, in terms of being aware of what drivers should be leveraged in order to create better customer experiences.

5.3 Scientific Implications

This thesis is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature with regard to the food consumption dynamics applied to the away from home environment. In particular, it aims to determine the effects exercised by various components of the offering and personal attitudes toward food, on customer experience.

This model, with respect to the existing literature, studies the customer experience dynamics in a specific environment, the away from home one, in reference of one category of consumption: food consumption. Most prior literature has focused on studying customer experience in the retail environment, with respect of well-known brands, and FMCG product category (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007).

With respect to the extant literature regarding the exploration of the different types of pleasure (Alba & Williams, 2013) and their connection whit food consumption (Cornil & Chandon, 2016), this study has tested the effect of epicurean eating pleasure and visceral eating pleasure on customer experience, revealing the existence of a moderating buffering effect exercised by visceral eating pleasure on the relationship between price and customer experience.

In conclusion, this study aims to enrich the away from home research field with its findings and create the conditions to continuing the exploration of the customer experience dynamics in this specific environment.

5.4 Limitations

The limitations of this study are connected mainly to the representability of the sample, which, given the non-probability method adopted for its selection and the relatively small size, doesn't allowed the results to be generalized with reliability to the population under study.

As specified in the chapter 3. Methodology, the chosen data collection method, based on the administration of a web-based survey to respondents based in Italy, the study resorted to convenience sampling and snowball sampling, asking respondents to spread the questionnaire as much as possible by making word of mouth, did not allowed to collect perfectly consistent data.

As a possible consequence, the factor analysis produced unexpected results, inducing the merging of two different scales in one factor (service atmosphere) and the split of one scale in two different variables (visceral 1, visceral 2).

Another limitation of this study, which is inherent to the type of consumption under analysis, is the fragmentation of the food consumption styles in Italy, which is a territory full of different gastronomic cultures and habits. This circumstance, once again, constitutes a limit to the generalizability of the data to the whole Italian territory, considering that only two regions out of twenty have been reached significantly (most of the respondents are settled in Abruzzo and Lazio). The model should be tested including in the sample respondents from all the different Italian region to reach significant results generalizable to all the Italian territory.

As the food offering variable resulted to not affect the overall customer experience, another scale measuring food quality perception should be employed. The outcome of the regression analysis, excluding food offering from the variables exercising a significant effect, was unexpected. It's very unlikely that the quality of the food consumed at a foodservice establishment doesn't influence the customer experience. It could be supposed that the scale selected (Baek,

Kim, & Yu, 2010) whose item is: “The quality of this brand is very high” (where ‘brand’ has been replaced with ‘food’) doesn’t measure the food offering construct properly. A more fitting scale should be built appositely or found in the extant literature.

5.5 Future Research

To simplify the analysis, this model has been tested on a restricted range of store formats (full-service restaurants) and one type of consumption occasion: the dinner.

For the future research, it will be interesting to expand the study to a broader kind of store formats, including also limited-service formats like fast-food and self-service solutions, in order to observe the differences of the effects within these different scenarios. Perhaps the different components of the offering will exercise diverse effects in case of fast-food foodservice establishments with respect to fine-dining restaurants. Moreover, the consumers’ personal characteristics could affect customer experience in different ways depending on the scenario.

The same reasoning could be applied to the consumption occasion. The model could be tested on different consumption occasions to analyse the different impact of the independent variables on customer experience. The food consumption occasions range to be studied could vary from lunch to dinner, where lunch is expected to be a more utilitarian consumption occasion with respect to dinner, given the fact a large portion of consumers who choose to have lunch in a foodservice establishment, in particular during the working days, are forced because of the distances and the limited time of the lunch-break from work. Another consumption occasion that could be analysed is the ‘happy hour’, whit respect to the dinner. It could be supposed that for the ‘happy hour’, the social environment component exercises a significant effect on customer experience, assuming the purpose of this consumption occasion is, basically, the socialization.

An interesting analysis regarding consumption occasions range could also comprehend the differences between customer experiences drivers during working days with respect to the weekend.

To conclude, the model should comprehend more interaction effects.

If a better fitting scale measuring food offering will be found, resulting, possibly, in a significant effect of food offering on customer experience, the moderating effect of visceral eating pleasure tendency on the relationship between food offering and customer experience should be tested.

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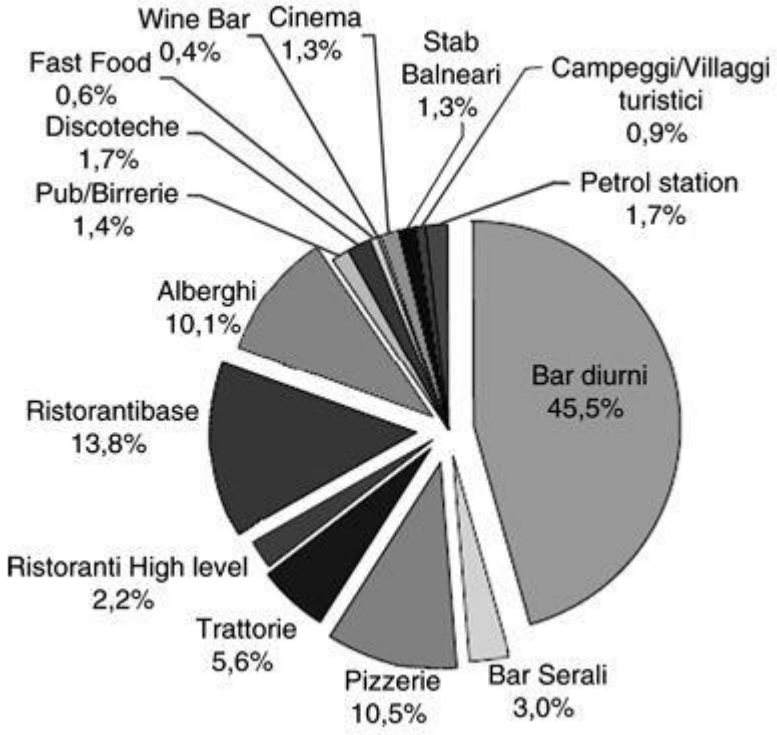
Appendices

Appendix 1. Italian foodservice establishments broken down by store format (in Italian). Source: Nielsen – LSDC 2008.



Appendix 2. Statistical analysis output (Stata 13)

```
 factor service_interface_* atmosphere_* brand_* price_*  social_media_* epicurean_* visceral* ,pcf
(obs=265)

Factor analysis/correlation                       Number of obs    =        265
    Method: principal-component factors           Retained factors =          7
    Rotation: (unrotated)                         Number of params =        217

    --------------------------------------------------------------------------
        Factor  |   Eigenvalue   Difference        Proportion   Cumulative
    ------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
        Factor1 |        7.72855      2.73694            0.2273       0.2273
        Factor2 |        4.99161      1.89471            0.1468       0.3741
        Factor3 |        3.09690      0.76444            0.0911       0.4652
        Factor4 |        2.33245      0.88103            0.0686       0.5338
        Factor5 |        1.45143      0.10128            0.0427       0.5765
        Factor6 |        1.35014      0.09006            0.0397       0.6162
        Factor7 |        1.26008      0.30462            0.0371       0.6533
        Factor8 |        0.95546      0.05686            0.0281       0.6814
        Factor9 |        0.89860      0.05830            0.0264       0.7078
       Factor10 |        0.84030      0.02035            0.0247       0.7325
       Factor11 |        0.81995      0.08001            0.0241       0.7566
       Factor12 |        0.73994      0.05923            0.0218       0.7784
       Factor13 |        0.68071      0.05683            0.0200       0.7984
       Factor14 |        0.62388      0.05290            0.0183       0.8168
       Factor15 |        0.57098      0.00662            0.0168       0.8336
       Factor16 |        0.56436      0.05666            0.0166       0.8502
       Factor17 |        0.50771      0.06120            0.0149       0.8651
       Factor18 |        0.44651      0.01750            0.0131       0.8782
       Factor19 |        0.42901      0.02602            0.0126       0.8908
       Factor20 |        0.40299      0.02626            0.0119       0.9027
       Factor21 |        0.37672      0.03659            0.0111       0.9138
       Factor22 |        0.34013      0.00204            0.0100       0.9238
       Factor23 |        0.33809      0.02506            0.0099       0.9337
       Factor24 |        0.31303      0.01804            0.0092       0.9429
       Factor25 |        0.29499      0.01887            0.0087       0.9516
       Factor26 |        0.27613      0.01498            0.0081       0.9597
       Factor27 |        0.26115      0.03106            0.0077       0.9674
       Factor28 |        0.23009      0.02115            0.0068       0.9742
       Factor29 |        0.20895      0.01694            0.0061       0.9803
       Factor30 |        0.19201      0.02599            0.0056       0.9860
       Factor31 |        0.16602      0.03824            0.0049       0.9908
       Factor32 |        0.12778      0.02686            0.0038       0.9946
       Factor33 |        0.10092      0.01851            0.0030       0.9976
       Factor34 |        0.08241            .            0.0024       1.0000
    --------------------------------------------------------------------------
    LR test: independent vs. saturated: chi2(561) = 5309.24 Prob>chi2 = 0.0000
```

Factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor6	Factor7	Uniqueness
service_in~1	0.5957	-0.2101	0.0638	-0.1291	-0.3658	0.3022	0.2007	0.3149
service_in~2	0.6403	-0.1670	0.0447	-0.1892	-0.4187	0.2319	0.2128	0.2500
service_in~3	0.6110	-0.1655	0.0796	-0.1091	-0.2884	0.1860	0.2597	0.3959
atmosphere_1	0.6425	-0.2661	-0.0347	0.1626	-0.2243	0.3128	-0.2236	0.2906
atmosphere_2	0.5688	-0.2140	0.0806	0.3070	-0.1666	0.3518	-0.3098	0.2824
atmosphere_3	0.5899	-0.1373	-0.0090	0.4401	-0.0674	0.0533	-0.0505	0.4294
brand_1	0.5462	-0.1359	0.1722	0.6684	0.1112	-0.1901	0.0172	0.1580
brand_2	0.5411	-0.1098	0.1827	0.6683	0.0628	-0.2729	0.1478	0.1149
brand_3	0.4685	-0.1351	0.2043	0.6141	0.1316	-0.2555	0.1291	0.2442
price_1	0.7853	-0.2553	-0.2964	-0.1392	-0.0360	-0.0658	0.0128	0.2051
price_2	0.8036	-0.2479	-0.3245	-0.1465	-0.0221	-0.1186	0.0297	0.1506
price_3	0.7678	-0.2239	-0.3268	-0.2548	0.1412	-0.1665	0.0022	0.1409
price_4	0.7308	-0.2058	-0.3208	-0.2497	0.1774	-0.1946	-0.0462	0.1868
price_5	0.5763	-0.1929	-0.3128	-0.3963	0.3147	-0.1450	-0.0796	0.2494
price_6	0.7399	-0.1855	-0.2270	-0.2297	0.1579	-0.2186	-0.0687	0.2363
social_med~1	0.3044	0.2150	0.0400	0.1095	0.5033	0.5100	-0.1039	0.3233
social_med~2	0.3500	0.2662	0.0065	0.0411	0.5078	0.4328	-0.2484	0.2981
epicurean_1	0.3481	0.2650	0.2582	-0.1284	0.0717	-0.0139	-0.2550	0.6551
epicurean_2	0.3964	0.3018	0.4021	-0.2321	0.0384	-0.0672	0.1073	0.5187
epicurean_3	0.3345	0.2377	0.5008	-0.1286	-0.0972	-0.1411	-0.0837	0.5279
epicurean_4	0.4220	0.3309	0.5483	-0.1373	0.0773	0.0270	0.1062	0.3749
epicurean_5	0.3197	0.4096	0.5478	-0.1486	0.0044	-0.0185	0.1679	0.3793
epicurean_6	0.4189	0.3317	0.5891	-0.2079	0.0435	-0.0427	0.0232	0.3200
epicurean_7	0.2256	0.3336	0.5455	-0.2244	0.0922	-0.1493	-0.0077	0.4591
visceral_1	0.2192	0.5389	-0.2337	0.0686	-0.2780	-0.1617	-0.3715	0.3607
visceral_2	0.2320	0.6532	-0.0727	0.0357	-0.1797	0.0220	-0.3658	0.3464
visceral_3	0.1900	0.6701	-0.0984	0.0353	-0.1865	-0.2078	-0.2445	0.3662
visceral_4	0.2018	0.7159	-0.1478	0.0240	-0.1778	-0.0668	-0.1323	0.3708
visceral_5	0.1727	0.5928	-0.3542	0.1677	-0.0276	0.0434	0.1795	0.4304
visceral_6	0.1517	0.6467	-0.2944	0.0583	0.0241	0.0780	0.2953	0.3749
visceral_7	0.1192	0.7075	-0.3528	0.0631	0.0090	-0.0346	0.1657	0.3281
visceral_8	0.1053	-0.4484	0.3855	-0.1206	0.1024	-0.0085	-0.0296	0.6133
visceral_9	0.1998	0.4655	-0.1856	0.1108	0.1516	0.1772	0.3592	0.5133
visceral_10	0.1447	0.4661	-0.2873	0.0047	0.1071	0.0722	0.2889	0.5791

. rotate

Factor analysis/correlation — Number of obs = 265
Method: principal-component factors — Retained factors = 7
Rotation: orthogonal varimax (Kaiser off) — Number of params = 217

Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	5.12523	1.46109	0.1507	0.1507
Factor2	3.66414	0.47781	0.1078	0.2585
Factor3	3.18633	0.21015	0.0937	0.3522
Factor4	2.97618	0.08254	0.0875	0.4398
Factor5	2.89364	0.21763	0.0851	0.5249
Factor6	2.67601	0.98639	0.0787	0.6036
Factor7	1.68962	.	0.0497	0.6533

LR test: independent vs. saturated: chi2(561) = 5309.24 Prob>chi2 = 0.0000

Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor6	Factor7	Uniqueness
service_in~1	0.3161	0.1571	0.0705	0.0196	-0.0932	0.7389	-0.0211	0.3149
service_in~2	0.3753	0.2010	0.0452	0.0478	-0.0381	0.7440	-0.0972	0.2500
service_in~3	0.3483	0.2150	0.1354	0.0779	-0.1112	0.6294	-0.0605	0.3959
atmosphere_1	0.3380	-0.0736	0.2933	-0.2104	0.1407	0.6140	0.2503	0.2906
atmosphere_2	0.1759	-0.0511	0.3865	-0.2663	0.1778	0.5533	0.3549	0.2824
atmosphere_3	0.2488	-0.0443	0.5936	-0.0185	0.1104	0.3436	0.1545	0.4294
brand_1	0.1584	0.0609	0.8906	-0.0362	0.0240	0.0901	0.0996	0.1580
brand_2	0.1501	0.1027	0.9172	0.0489	-0.0124	0.0867	-0.0268	0.1149
brand_3	0.1295	0.1062	0.8500	0.0088	-0.0667	0.0244	0.0095	0.2442
price_1	0.7968	-0.0191	0.1912	0.0211	0.0364	0.3481	0.0143	0.2051
price_2	0.8391	-0.0186	0.2036	0.0449	0.0418	0.3155	-0.0156	0.1506
price_3	0.9028	0.0316	0.1217	0.0384	0.0031	0.1576	0.0439	0.1409
price_4	0.8864	0.0299	0.1170	0.0124	0.0286	0.0918	0.0601	0.1868
price_5	0.8481	0.0426	-0.0714	-0.0156	-0.0455	-0.0413	0.1432	0.2494
price_6	0.8448	0.1043	0.1558	-0.0293	0.0514	0.0937	0.0493	0.2363
social_med~1	0.0744	0.1266	0.0897	0.1789	-0.0295	0.0464	0.7823	0.3233
social_med~2	0.1639	0.1501	0.0480	0.1176	0.1099	-0.0153	0.7900	0.2981
epicurean_1	0.1542	0.4269	0.0391	-0.0890	0.2867	0.0238	0.2159	0.6551
epicurean_2	0.1501	0.6569	0.0385	0.1020	0.0728	0.0917	0.0408	0.5187
epicurean_3	0.0417	0.6259	0.1184	-0.1183	0.1986	0.1007	-0.0306	0.5279
epicurean_4	0.0460	0.7452	0.1295	0.0844	0.0454	0.1364	0.1516	0.3749
epicurean_5	-0.0467	0.7549	0.0804	0.1516	0.0715	0.1086	0.0472	0.3793
epicurean_6	0.0708	0.7961	0.0866	-0.0036	0.1065	0.1066	0.1052	0.3200
epicurean_7	0.0019	0.7226	0.0179	-0.0307	0.1018	-0.0770	0.0352	0.4591
visceral_1	0.0900	0.0201	0.0209	0.1571	0.7778	0.0104	-0.0252	0.3607
visceral_2	-0.0122	0.1855	-0.0260	0.1905	0.7412	0.0490	0.1741	0.3464
visceral_3	0.0218	0.2075	0.0236	0.2640	0.7155	-0.0845	-0.0316	0.3662
visceral_4	0.0004	0.1907	-0.0252	0.4008	0.6560	0.0018	0.0358	0.3708
visceral_5	0.0259	-0.0342	0.0677	0.6519	0.3626	0.0113	0.0814	0.4304
visceral_6	0.0126	0.0787	-0.0217	0.7331	0.2705	0.0001	0.0882	0.3749
visceral_7	0.0314	0.0419	-0.0309	0.6921	0.4195	-0.1036	0.0503	0.3281
visceral_8	0.1003	0.2066	0.0816	-0.4382	-0.3593	0.0767	0.0146	0.6133
visceral_9	0.0232	0.0958	0.0743	0.6533	0.0485	0.0454	0.2005	0.5133
visceral_10	0.0910	0.0387	-0.0367	0.6183	0.1274	-0.0276	0.1023	0.5791

```
. factor ce_*, pcf
(obs=265)

Factor analysis/correlation                       Number of obs    =        265
    Method: principal-component factors           Retained factors =          1
    Rotation: (unrotated)                         Number of params =          3
```

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	2.53834	2.17381	0.8461	0.8461
Factor2	0.36453	0.26739	0.1215	0.9676
Factor3	0.09714	.	0.0324	1.0000

LR test: independent vs. saturated: chi2(3) = 634.04 Prob>chi2 = 0.0000

Factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Uniqueness
ce_1	0.9432	0.1104
ce_2	0.9518	0.0941
ce_3	0.8618	0.2573

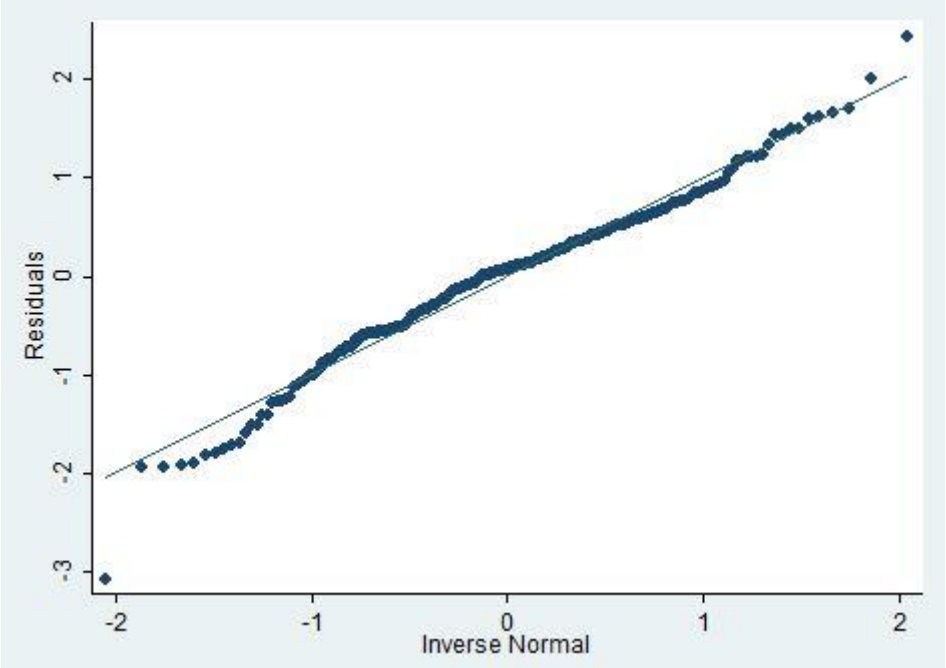
```
. rotate

Factor analysis/correlation                       Number of obs    =        265
    Method: principal-component factors           Retained factors =          1
    Rotation: orthogonal varimax (Kaiser off)     Number of params =          3

    ------------------------------------------------------------------------------
        Factor  |     Variance   Difference        Proportion   Cumulative
    ------------+-----------------------------------------------------------------
       Factor1  |      2.53834            .            0.8461       0.8461
    ------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    LR test: independent vs. saturated:  chi2(3)  =  634.04 Prob>chi2 = 0.0000

Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

    ---------------------------------------
       Variable |  Factor1 |   Uniqueness
    ------------+----------+--------------
           ce_1 |   0.9432 |      0.1104
           ce_2 |   0.9518 |      0.0941
           ce_3 |   0.8618 |      0.2573
    ---------------------------------------

Factor rotation matrix

    ----------------------
                | Factor1
    ------------+---------
        Factor1 |  1.0000
    ----------------------

. alpha visceral_1-visceral_4, item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                          average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item         |  Obs  Sign   correlation   correlation     covariance      alpha
-------------+------------------------------------------------------------------
visceral_1   |  265    +       0.7788        0.6201        .7820183      0.7806
visceral_2   |  265    +       0.8275        0.6762         .685344      0.7530
visceral_3   |  265    +       0.8016        0.6397        .7302506      0.7704
visceral_4   |  265    +       0.8124        0.6282        .6853678      0.7789
-------------+------------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale   |                                             .7207452      0.8177
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

. alpha visceral_5-visceral_10, item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                          average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item         |  Obs  Sign   correlation   correlation     covariance      alpha
-------------+------------------------------------------------------------------
visceral_5   |  265    +       0.7611        0.6069         .770819      0.7461
visceral_6   |  265    +       0.7935        0.6736        .7673785      0.7298
visceral_7   |  265    +       0.7956        0.6907        .7943539      0.7298
visceral_8   |  265    -       0.5827        0.4105         .973532      0.7903
visceral_9   |  265    +       0.6326        0.4622        .9228959      0.7800
visceral_10  |  265    +       0.6448        0.4545        .8958805      0.7844
-------------+------------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale   |                                             .8541433      0.7930
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

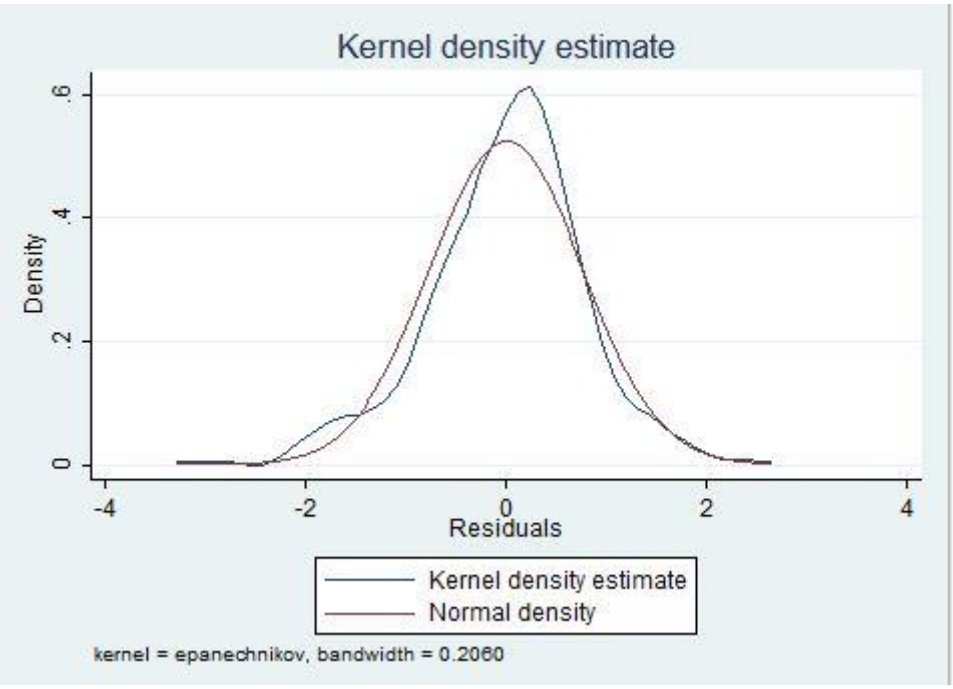
```
. alpha ce_1-ce_3, gen(m_ce) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
ce_1          |  265    +      0.9254       0.8443        2.37054      0.8180
ce_2          |  265    +      0.9366       0.8635       2.231761      0.7982
ce_3          |  265    +      0.8922       0.7175       2.308562      0.9483
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                          2.303621      0.8949
------------------------------------------------------------------------------

. alpha social_media_1 social_media_2, gen(m_socialm) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

Average interitem covariance:     .7319897
Number of items in the scale:            2
Scale reliability coefficient:      0.6378

. alpha visceral_1-visceral_4, item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
visceral_1    |  265    +      0.7788       0.6201        .7820183      0.7806
visceral_2    |  265    +      0.8275       0.6762         .685344      0.7530
visceral_3    |  265    +      0.8016       0.6397        .7302506      0.7704
visceral_4    |  265    +      0.8124       0.6282        .6853678      0.7789
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                          .7207452      0.8177
------------------------------------------------------------------------------

. alpha visceral_5-visceral_10, item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
visceral_5    |  265    +      0.7611       0.6069         .770819      0.7461
visceral_6    |  265    +      0.7935       0.6736        .7673785      0.7298
visceral_7    |  265    +      0.7956       0.6907        .7943539      0.7298
visceral_8    |  265    -      0.5827       0.4105         .973532      0.7903
visceral_9    |  265    +      0.6326       0.4622        .9228959      0.7800
visceral_10   |  265    +      0.6448       0.4545        .8958805      0.7844
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                          .8541433      0.7930
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

```
. alpha price_1-price_6, gen(m_price) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
price_1       |  265    +       0.8671       0.8132       1.724914      0.9287
price_2       |  265    +       0.9016       0.8576       1.656511      0.9230
price_3       |  265    +       0.9250       0.8892       1.607087      0.9188
price_4       |  265    +       0.8951       0.8483       1.661321      0.9241
price_5       |  265    +       0.8205       0.7267       1.652872      0.9413
price_6       |  265    +       0.8697       0.8031       1.618593      0.9298
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                           1.65355      0.9389
------------------------------------------------------------------------------

. alpha service_*,gen(m_service) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
atmosphere_1  |  265    +       0.7642       0.6668        .6757276      0.7939
atmosphere_2  |  265    +       0.7162       0.5930        .6869125      0.8050
atmosphere_3  |  265    +       0.6531       0.4930        .7092038      0.8240
service_in~1  |  265    +       0.7731       0.6289        .6032276      0.7979
service_in~2  |  265    +       0.7839       0.6621        .6156146      0.7893
service_in~3  |  265    +       0.7410       0.5952         .638056      0.8043
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                           .6547904      0.8300
------------------------------------------------------------------------------


. alpha ce_1-ce_3, gen(m_ce) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

                                                        average
                          item-test     item-rest       interitem
Item          |  Obs  Sign  correlation  correlation     covariance      alpha
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
ce_1          |  265    +       0.9254       0.8443         2.37054      0.8180
ce_2          |  265    +       0.9366       0.8635        2.231761      0.7982
ce_3          |  265    +       0.8922       0.7175        2.308562      0.9483
--------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
Test scale    |                                           2.303621      0.8949
------------------------------------------------------------------------------

. alpha social_media_1 social_media_2, gen(m_socialm) item

Test scale = mean(unstandardized items)

Average interitem covariance:     .7319897
Number of items in the scale:            2
Scale reliability coefficient:      0.6378
```

```
. reg m_ce income m_epicurean m_visceral_1 m_visceral_2 age social_interface m_service_atm food_offering m_price
> m_brand m_socialm

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =     265
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,   253) =   74.86
       Model |  519.847957    11  47.2589052           Prob > F      =  0.0000
    Residual |  159.726041   253  .631328224           R-squared     =  0.7650
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.7547
       Total |  679.573998   264  2.57414393           Root MSE      =  .79456

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
         m_ce |      Coef.   Std. Err.      t    P>|t|     [95% Conf. Interval]
--------------+---------------------------------------------------------------
       income |  -.0184705   .0472689    -0.39   0.696    -.1115612    .0746202
   m_epicurean |    .072811   .0632963     1.15   0.251    -.0518437    .1974658
  m_visceral_1 |  -.0969221   .0694821    -1.39   0.164    -.2337591    .0399148
  m_visceral_2 |   .0660584   .0613079     1.08   0.282    -.0546806    .1867973
           age |   .0011348   .0042903     0.26   0.792    -.0073144     .009584
social_interface |   .0235687   .0467744     0.50   0.615     -.068548    .1156854
 m_service_atm |   .2948531    .079947     3.69   0.000     .1374066    .4522995
 food_offering |  -.0740079    .054096    -1.37   0.172    -.1805437    .0325278
       m_price |   .9029163   .0491554    18.37   0.000     .8061105    .9997222
       m_brand |   .1264018    .042275     2.99   0.003     .0431461    .2096574
     m_socialm |   .0021712   .0501463     0.04   0.965    -.0965862    .1009287
         _cons |  -1.746547   .5137274    -3.40   0.001    -2.758274   -.7348204
------------------------------------------------------------------------------


. ///reg con nuove interazioni mean-centred
>
. reg m_ce income m_epicurean m_visceral_1 m_visceral_2 age social_interface m_service_atm food_offering m_price
> m_brand m_socialm visceral_1xprice visceral_2xprice epicureanxprice epicureanxfood incomexprice incomexbrand in
> comexserviceatm brandxprice agexserviceatm agexprice

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =     265
-------------+------------------------------           F( 21,   243) =   39.86
       Model |  526.670164    21  25.0795316           Prob > F      =  0.0000
    Residual |  152.903834   243  .629233884           R-squared     =  0.7750
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.7556
       Total |  679.573998   264  2.57414393           Root MSE      =  .79324

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
         m_ce |      Coef.   Std. Err.      t    P>|t|     [95% Conf. Interval]
--------------+---------------------------------------------------------------
       income |  -.0166929   .0485444    -0.34   0.731    -.1123144    .0789287
   m_epicurean |   .1046372   .0682035     1.53   0.126    -.0297083    .2389828
  m_visceral_1 |   -.117281   .0715094    -1.64   0.102    -.2581385    .0235764
  m_visceral_2 |    .085906   .0630544     1.36   0.174    -.0382968    .2101089
           age |   .0011728   .0043788     0.27   0.789    -.0074525    .0097981
social_interface |   .0345303   .0491248     0.70   0.483    -.0622344    .1312951
 m_service_atm |   .3083734   .0848947     3.63   0.000       .14115    .4755968
 food_offering |  -.1064974   .0581225    -1.83   0.068    -.2209856    .0079907
       m_price |   .8886635   .0527154    16.86   0.000      .784826     .992501
       m_brand |   .1162007   .0431066     2.70   0.008     .0312904    .2011111
     m_socialm |   .0005836   .0515804     0.01   0.991    -.1010181    .1021853
 visceral_1xprice |  -.1299193    .053752    -2.42   0.016    -.2357986     -.02404
 visceral_2xprice |   .0440513   .0508532     0.87   0.387    -.0561181    .1442207
  epicureanxprice |   .0827844   .0568766     1.46   0.147    -.0292495    .1948184
   epicureanxfood |  -.0158853    .053656    -0.30   0.767    -.1215755    .0898048
     incomexprice |  -.0463024   .0468737    -0.99   0.324    -.1386329    .0460282
     incomexbrand |   .0441067   .0358976     1.23   0.220    -.0266034    .1148168
incomexserviceatm |  -.0536639   .0755843    -0.71   0.478    -.2025479    .0952201
      brandxprice |  -.0251103   .0290403    -0.86   0.388    -.0823132    .0320927
   agexserviceatm |   .0032959   .0053761     0.61   0.540    -.0072939    .0138856
        agexprice |   .0005978   .0041613     0.14   0.886    -.0075989    .0087946
            _cons |  -1.723074   .5304905    -3.25   0.001    -2.768021   -.6781278
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

```
. vif

    Variable |       VIF       1/VIF
-------------+----------------------
m_service_~m |      2.39    0.419186
food_offer~g |      2.32    0.431501
visceral_2~e |      2.26    0.443334
visceral_1~e |      2.25    0.443637
incomexser~m |      2.07    0.482988
     m_price |      2.05    0.487018
epicureanx~e |      1.96    0.509539
incomexprice |      1.95    0.511742
m_visceral_1 |      1.89    0.528821
   agexprice |      1.86    0.537688
agexservic~m |      1.84    0.542268
m_visceral_2 |      1.80    0.556566
 brandxprice |      1.68    0.595934
epicureanx~d |      1.59    0.627678
     m_brand |      1.57    0.638545
 m_epicurean |      1.49    0.669227
incomexbrand |      1.38    0.726591
social_int~e |      1.36    0.734257
         age |      1.33    0.751369
   m_socialm |      1.28    0.780535
      income |      1.24    0.806771
-------------+----------------------
    Mean VIF |      1.79

.
| estat imtest, white

White's test for Ho: homoskedasticity
         against Ha: unrestricted heteroskedasticity

         chi2(220)    =    243.55
         Prob > chi2  =    0.1321

Cameron & Trivedi's decomposition of IM-test

---------------------------------------------------
              Source |       chi2     df      p
---------------------+-----------------------------
  Heteroskedasticity |     243.55    220    0.1321
            Skewness |      65.97     21    0.0000
            Kurtosis |       2.43      1    0.1187
---------------------+-----------------------------
               Total |     311.95    242    0.0016
```


Residuals
-3
-2
-1
0
1
2
-2
-1
0
1
2
Inverse Normal


Kernel density estimate
Density
0
.2
.4
.6
-4
-2
0
2
4
Residuals
Kernel density estimate
Normal density
kernel = epanechnikov, bandwidth = 0.2060

Summary

Customer Experience:
A study of the away from home food consumption dynamics.

Table of contents

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Thesis

Customer experience is a key concept in the modern managerial approaches. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), who are among the first authors to discuss about this concept, customer experience is the next stage, after services, in the progression of the economic value. At first, managers put the focus on the physical product, then to services and, as a more recent step, to experiences.

Despite the academic community has analysed this concept under many perspectives - starting with Pine and Gilmore (1998), who gave a first managerial direction to customer experience; Gentile et al. (2007), who formulated a customer experience model to understand the specific role of different experiential features in the success achieved by some well-known products; the study by Novak et al. (2000), which proposed a customer experience model applied to the on-line environment, that embodies the components of what makes for a compelling online experience; concluding with the conceptual model proposed by Verhoef et al. (2009), which investigates the elements that create the customer experience in the retail environment - there is lack of a customer experience model applied to the *away from home* context in the extant literature. Given that, the attempt of the present thesis is to provide a model which comprises the main drivers of customer experience applied to the specific environment of the *away from home food* consumption.

In particular, besides the components of the offering, that are usually designated as the drivers of customer experience in the models present in literature, also the personal characteristics of the consumers related to food consumption will be taken into account.

On the basis of the last considerations, the main research question will be:

> *How do the different elements of the offering and personal attitudinal characteristics of the consumers affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?*

Sub questions:

- How do the different components of the offering (social environment, service interface, atmosphere, food offering, price, brand prestige, eWOM) affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?

- How do consumer's characteristics (age, income, consumption purpose) moderate the effect of the components of the offering on the evaluation of customer experience?
- How does brand prestige moderate the effect of price on the evaluation of customer experience?

2. Past Literature Analysis

2.1 Customer Experience

> *"The customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels. Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touch-points".* (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007)

Pine and Gilmore are among the first authors to talk about customer experience in a book published in the 1999 called "The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage". This publication is very important because it starts to focus the attention on experiences when talking about value creation. According to Pine and Gilmore, experiences are the next step in the progression of economic value. The component of experience is *"a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods"* and should be specifically designed to upgrade the companies' offering. In the publication 'Welcome to the Experience Economy', the authors suggest how companies should shift from selling services to selling experiences, *"because consumers un-questionably desire experiences".*

A definition of customer experience given by the authors in this paper is: *"An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable."*

The first conceptual model considered to be relevant for the phenomenon under study, is the one proposed by Baker et al. (2002). This study explored the effects of environmental cues on the store assessment by the customers. The concept under study is not exactly customer

experience but the store patronage intentions, that represents the assessment of a complete experience in a retail store by a customer. The proposed drivers of store patronage intentions are:

- Design perceptions
- Employee perceptions
- Music perceptions
- Time/effort cost perceptions
- Psychic cost perceptions
- Monetary price perceptions
- Interpersonal service quality
- Merchandise quality perceptions
- Merchandise value perceptions

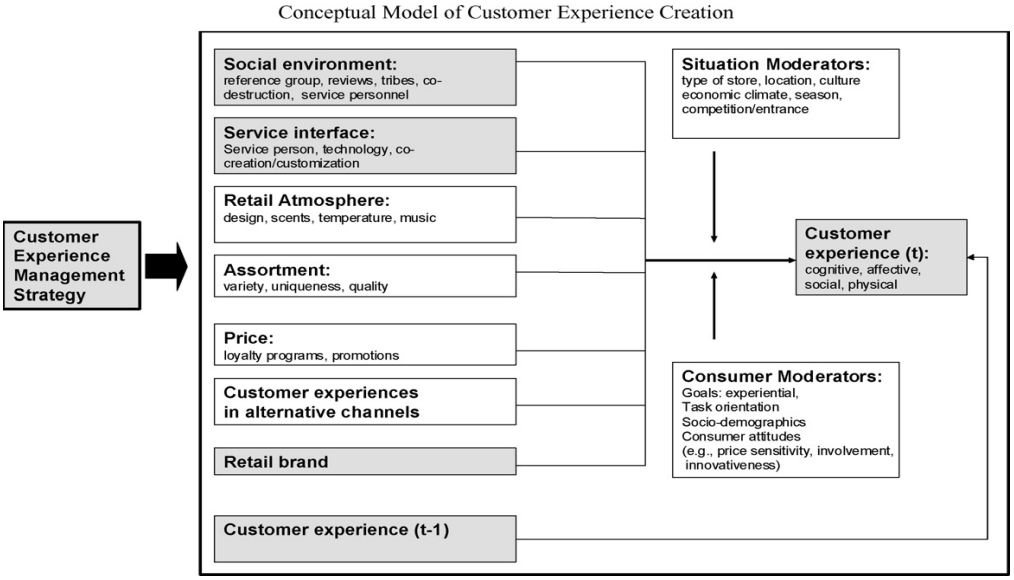
This study has proved store environmental cues affect store patronage intentions, which represent the behavioral attitudes that customers will have with respect to the store in the future, directly or indirectly, through the perceived merchandise quality. The limitation of this research, as the other mentioned in this chapter, are that not all the drivers could be applied to the food consumption away from home environment, and, besides that, those drivers that still fit, could reasonably have a different impact on customer experience assessment in the away from home environment (e.g. restaurants) with respect to the at home environment (grocery stores).

Another study taken into consideration is the one done by Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007). The study presents a conceptual model of the antecedents of customer experience, more consumer perceptions-oriented, based on the concept of 'multidimensionality' of the mind. In the first part there is an analysis of the aspects of customer experience on which a series of well-known companies focused in its strategies, while in the second part a market research has been performed to assess how customers perceive the different components of the customer experience. The authors assumed the following components as dimensions of the model:

- Sensorial component
- Emotional component
- Cognitive component
- Pragmatic component
- Lifestyle component
- Relational component

The results of the study demonstrated that the sensorial component has the overall highest impact on the customer experience assessment, while the relational one has the overall lowest impact.

The last customer experience model considered to be relevant, is the one developed by Verhoef et al. (2009).



The research investigates the elements that create customer experience, adopting a theoretical approach. The proposed model provides for eight determinants of customer experience:

- social environment
- service interface
- retail atmosphere
- assortment
- price and promotions
- customer experience in alternative channels
- retail brand
- customer experiences at time *t-1*

This study takes into consideration new variables with respect to the previous literature: The social environment component, that represents the compatibility of the consumers inside the store, captures a new dimension to consider in the customer experience assessment, besides the interpersonal relationship with the store's employees. Also considering the impact of experiences in alternative channels represents an innovation with respect to past literature.

2.2 The Antecedents of Food Consumption

During the 1980s, Holbrook and Hirschman started to explore the concept of "hedonic consumption" related to the intangible and subjective aspects of consumption, introducing a new hedonic perspective. The Hedonic consumption is defined as *"those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience"*. In the last decade, the hedonic consumption perspective has been adopted to study and classify the different sources and determinants of pleasure (Alba, Williams, 2013) and how it is connected with the consumption styles (Cornil, Chandon, 2016). According to the researchers Alba and Williams (2013), there are two general categories of determinants of pleasure: the product/service/event and the consumer's personal experience with the product/service/event. The pure sensory sources of pleasures are intuitive and immediately recognizable (e.g., sweet food is a sensory source of pleasure).

A further research (Cornil, Chandon, 2016) examines the differences between two contrasting pleasures related to food consumption: *visceral pleasure* and *epicurean pleasure*, and the consequent consumption effects. The visceral eating pleasure is defined as the *"short-lived hedonic relief created by the satisfaction of eating impulses".* It is triggered by visceral impulses such as hunger, internal emotional urges or external cues. The epicurean eating pleasure is defined as a more enduring pleasure *"derived from the aesthetic appreciation of the sensory and symbolic value of the food"*. The aim of the research was to compare the two different pleasures and understand the different effects on food consumption styles, through the construction of scales. The visceral eating pleasure has three main characteristics:

- It is beyond consumer's volition, so it cannot be controlled, and the consumer is not aware of it.
- It is a mean to satisfy an urge, so it's not an end itself. This means that the pleasure from eating can be substituted by any other hedonic pleasure, such as doing compulsive shopping.
- It is a unitary phenomenon which can be summarized by its valence, meaning it can be measured evaluating how good it feels to eat.

The visceral eating pleasure can be measured by two existing scales (van Strien et al., 1986): the *external eating*, refers to the external factors that can trigger pleasure, mainly the sensory

properties of food; and the *emotional eating*, which refers to the internal emotions, usually negative, that can lead to the creation of an urgent need. In contrast, the epicurean eating pleasure has the opposed characteristics:

- It is within consumers volition.
- It's unrelated to impulses. It's not an automatic response to bodily urges, but a more profound, high-order eating pleasure. It could be described as the "pleasure of the mind" rather than only the "pleasure of the body".
- It cannot be captured simply by its valence, meaning the various components of the pleasure cannot be separated and measured, as they are linked to symbols and subjective values.

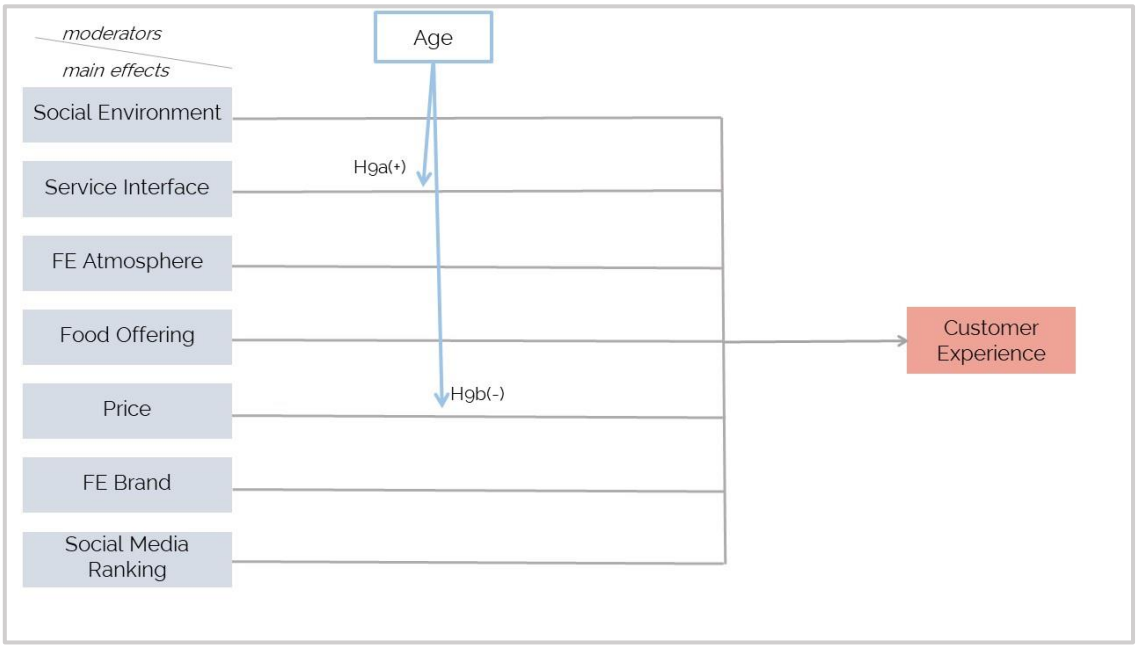
The results show that people experimenting more frequently epicurean eating pleasure are more incline to prefer small portion sizes of fine food and overall wellbeing, while people experimenting visceral eating pleasure tend to overeat and prefer quantity over quality.

3 The Conceptual Model and the Hypothesis Development

Following the aspects emerged from the literature analysed regarding food consumption and later customer experience, a conceptual model of customer experience drivers applied to away from home food consumption has been developed.

It is important to underly the fact that all the relevant customer experience models existing in literature, don't fit the away from home environment. This is because all the studies analysed take into account FMCG/FMCD as object of consumption or simply retail stores as place of purchase/consumption.

The model has maintained part of the variables that constitute the Verhoef et al. (2009) model, tailored to the away from home food consumption environment. Other variables have been drawn exclusively for this model. All the variables, with the exclusion of *age* and *income*, are considered within the consumer's perception.



3.1 The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the model is Customer Experience, which "*depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touchpoints"* (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005; Schmitt, 1999). The last sentence determines the fact that the evaluation of the customer experience given by the consumer is affected by all the stages before and after consumption, as long as they take place in contact with the company. Taking into account the food consumption experience in a restaurant, that is the away from home major example, the stages to consider that affect the expectations are the ones from the selection of the FE, to the payment of the bill at the counter.

3.2 The Independent Variables

The main effects of the model are quite self-evident and are the transposition of the Verhoef et al. (2009) customer experience model to the away from home food consumption context:

- *Social environment* represents the perceived compatibility between the consumer and the other fellow customers inside the restaurant.

- *Service interface* represents the perceived quality of the service inside the restaurant. It involves in the evaluation of the timing and staff expertise aspects.
- *FE atmosphere* represents the perception of the environmental cues of the restaurant. Basically, the exterior pleasantness of the FE and the overall atmosphere judgement.
- *Food offering* indicates the evaluation given by the consumer of the food & beverage products consumed at the restaurant.
- *Price* represents the perceived level of convenience of the price paid by the consumer for the experience at the restaurant. It is perceived in relation to the other elements of the offering, in fact, it involves in the judgement of the convenience and fairness of the price and, as a consequence, in the value for money perception.
- *FE Brand* stands for the perceived prestige of the restaurant.
- *Social media ranking* indicates the willingness of consumers to decide to go to a certain restaurant after seeing the restaurant rating on specialized websites (E.g. TripAdvisor) or social networks. It measures to what extent consumers are affected by eWOM.

Following the delineation of each IV, these different assumptions can be made:

H1: The higher is the perception of social environment by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H2: The higher is the perception of service interface by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H3: The higher is the perception of FE atmosphere by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H4: The higher is the perception of food offering by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H5: The higher is the perception of price by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H6: The higher is the perception of FE brand by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.
H7: The higher is the perception of Social Media Ranking by the consumer, the higher will be the customer experience evaluation.

3.3 Moderating Effects

The model comprehends four moderators that influence the effect of the IVs on customer experience. These variables are: *age*; *income*; *FE brand*; *consumption purpose.*

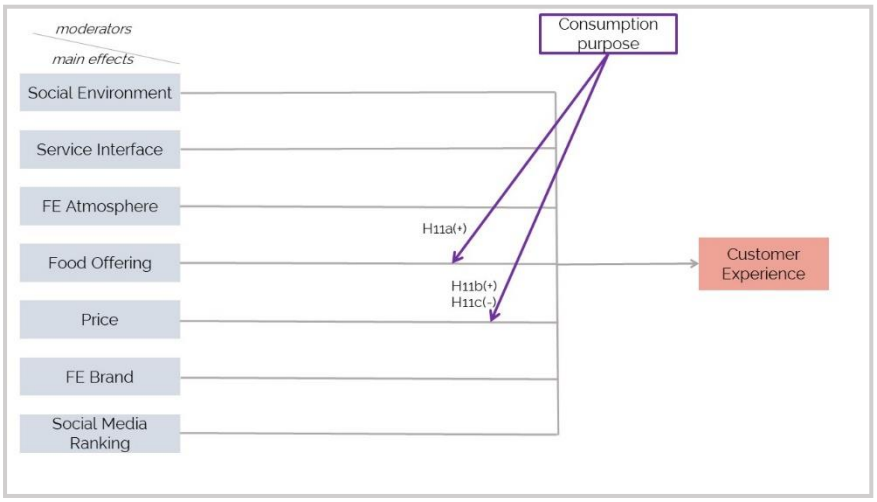
The first two moderators are demographic variables.

In this study, *age* is supposed to moderate the effect of the perceived service quality and perceived price on customer experience. The younger is the consumer, the less will be the weight of service interface and the higher the weight of the price on the evaluation of the customer experience. This hypothesis is made considering the age as a proxy of the expertise of consumers for what concerns fine-dining and restaurant culture.

Income is supposed to moderate the effects of the perceived restaurant brand prestige, price and service on customer experience. The higher the consumer's income, the higher the weight of the perceived brand prestige and the less the weight of price will be on customer experience. These assumptions are made upon the study conducted by Thorstein Veblen (1899) which suggests that the public consumption of prestige brands is used by people to make signals about their status and wealth, and the price, expensive by normal standards, enhances the value of such a signal. Given that, consumers with a high income are supposed to give great value to the restaurant brand in order to communicate their status and wealth and, consequently, not much weight to the value for money on the evaluation of the customer experience.

The third moderator, *FE brand*, represents the perceived brand prestige of the restaurant by the consumer, and exercise both a direct and indirect effects to customer experience. Brand prestige is supposed to reduce the incidence of price on the evaluation of the customer experience, as its perception increase. This assumption is linked to the Veblen theory that accounts also for the income moderating effects, as explained above. In this case, as the brand prestige constitutes a signal of the wealth and status, and a higher price supports this signal, for a higher perception of the restaurant brand prestige, a smaller importance will be given to the value for money component. The last moderator is *consumption purpose* (Fig. 11), which represents the attitudinal level of the consumer to seek *epicurean eating pleasure* and *visceral eating pleasure*. As previously said, the epicurean eating pleasure is defined as an enduring pleasure *"derived from the aesthetic appreciation of the sensory and symbolic value of the food"* (Cornil & Chandon, 2016), and is opposed to the visceral eating pleasure, a short-lived hedonic pleasure triggered by visceral impulses such as hunger, internal emotional urges or external cues. In the present

study will be observed the difference between the way consumers driven by visceral eating pleasure or epicurean eating pleasure are affected by the IVs for their customer experience evaluation. In particular, with respect to food offering, that measures the perceived quality of the food, and price, which measures the perceived convenience of price paid for the experience.



Following the delineation of each moderator, these different assumptions can be made:

H8a: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.

H8b: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the income increases.

H8c: Income has a moderating effect in the relationship of FE brand and customer experience. The effect of FE brand on customer experience evaluation increases as the income increases.

H9a: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of service interface and customer experience. The effect of service interface on customer experience evaluation increases as the age increases.

H9b: Age has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the age increases.

H10: FE brand has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the FE brand increases.

H11a: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of food offering and customer experience. The effect of food offering on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.

H11b: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation increases as the tendency of the consumer to seek epicurean eating pleasure increases.

H11c: Consumption purpose has a moderating effect in the relationship of price and customer experience. The effect of price on customer experience evaluation decreases as the tendency of the consumer to seek visceral eating pleasure increases.

4 Methodology

The main research question is:

> *How do the different elements of the offering and personal attitudinal characteristics of the consumers affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?*

Sub questions:

- How do the different components of the offering (social environment, service interface, atmosphere, food offering, price, brand prestige, eWOM) affect the evaluation of customer experience in the away from home food consumption context?
- How do consumer's characteristics (age, income, consumption purpose) moderate the effect of the components of the offering on the evaluation of customer experience?
- How does brand prestige moderate the effect of price on the evaluation of customer experience?

Given these research questions, the study of this thesis was structured following a quantitative approach, built with a web-based survey conducted in Italy, hence, using primary data.

The model was tested in reference to one consumption occasion and to a restricted types of store formats. The consumption occasion is the dinner because has more chances to encompass both utilitarian and hedonic needs.

The store formats under analysis are the full-service ones. This choice is motivated by the fact that these types of foodservice establishments comprehends in their offering all the constructs belonging to the model.

4.1 Data Collection Method

The data has been collected by the administration of a web-based survey to Italian respondents or non-Italian respondents based in Italy.

The survey was divided into three sections:

- The first section started with the invite to respondents to review the last experience had in a full-service restaurant, by answering the following questions. The respondents were asked to evaluate the different elements of the offering contained in the model, in reference to the restaurant experience: social environment; service interface; FE atmosphere; food offering; price; FE brand. Then, they were asked to evaluate the customer experience had at the restaurant and, finally, to specify the purpose of the dinner-out in terms of pleasure vs duty and satisfaction of an appetite need vs desire to make a gastronomic experience. The last questions were intended to classify the nature of the consumption experience as epicurean or visceral.
- In the second section, respondents were asked to answer to questions about their personal relationship with food consumption. The first sequence of questions was intended to individuate the tendency of respondents to seek epicurean eating pleasure, while having a food consumption experience. Similarly, the second sequence was done to individuate the tendency of respondents to seek visceral eating pleasure, while having a food consumption experience. Finally, they were asked to specify if they follow a special diet.
- The last section was aimed to gather demographic data about respondents. The questions are about age, gender, income and nationality information.

4.2 Sampling Method

The study of this thesis used non-probability sampling. In particular the study resorted to convenience sampling and snowball sampling, asking respondents to spread the questionnaire as much as possible by making word of mouth.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Variables

A total of 265 usable observations were collected through the online survey.

The gender of the sample is distributed as follow: females constituted 60.75% of the sample, with 161 responses and males constituted 39.25% of the sample, with 104 responses. The age of the respondents varied from 11 to 68 years. It was decided to drop the observations for age < 18 to preserve reliability of the data. Following that, a remaining sample of 265 observations has been adopted (10 observations has been deleted from an initial sample of 275 observations). The mean age is 42 years.

The reported income of the respondents is distributed as follow: 40.38% in the €28,001– €55,000 range; 23.40% in the €15,001– €28,000 range; 19.62% in the less than €15.000 range; 9.43% in the €55,001– €75,000 range and 7.17% in the more than €75,000 range.

The 15.84 % of the respondents was following a special diet.

The foodservice establishment where the respondents have experienced the dinner they reviewed are classified in the following store formats: 50.18 % base restaurants; 24.15 % pizzeria; 15.47 % trattoria; 10.19 % fine-dining restaurants.

Most of the respondents are settled in Abruzzo (50,56 %) and Lazio (28,67 %).

5.2 Validity and Reliability Tests

In order to verify the validity and reliability of the variables that were measured by multi-item scales, the factor analysis and the Cronbach's alpha test were performed.

The model comprehends eight constructs measured with a multi-item scale. To inspect the construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed.

After the factor analysis, 7 factors with proper eigenvalues have been obtained. Service interface and FE atmosphere resulted to load on the same factor. Part of the visceral pleasure items (4 out of 10) resulted to load on a factor, while the other part of the visceral pleasure items (6 out of 10) resulted to load on a different factor.

Following the results of the analysis, a new variable called *service atmosphere*, including the items belonging to service interface and the ones belonging to FE atmosphere, was generated. The visceral pleasure variable was split in two different variables, one composed by the items loading on one factor, another one composed by the items loading on the other factor. One revers item resulted to be present on the visceral pleasure 1 scale. It was inverted before performing the multiple regression analysis.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

A multiple regression including the interaction effects was performed, showing a multicollinearity problem (VIF values are higher than 10 and income, epicurean pleasure, visceral pleasure (1) and visceral pleasure (2) changed sign of the effect). The multicollinearity problem was corrected with the mean-centering of the interactions. Another multiple regression including the mean-centered interactions was performed. The F-test showed significance of the model rejecting the hypothesis that all the coefficients are zero ($F(21, 25) = 41.44$, $p < 0.00$) and a good fit (adjusted R squared = 0.77). The VIF values were all lower then 10, the signs of the variables are consistent, so, multicollinearity problem has been solved. When inspecting the individual regression coefficients, the resulting significant effects were: price ($t = 17.25$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05/2$), service atmosphere ($t = 3.97$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05/2$), brand ($t = 3.00$, $p = 0.003 < 0.05/2$) and the interaction between visceral pleasure (1) and price ($t = -2.33$, $p = 0.021 < 0.05/2$). Summing up, price has a positive effect on CE (when price increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.87 units), service atmosphere has a positive effect on CE (when service atmosphere increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.33 units), brand has a positive effect on CE (when brand increases of 1 unit, CE increases of 0.13 units). As the regression analysis revealed a significant moderating effect of the interaction between visceral pleasure 1 and price, a further analysis of the directions was performed to assess the nature of this interaction. By observing that the direction

of the price in affecting CE is positive; the direction of visceral pleasure 1 in affecting CE is negative and the direction of the interaction between visceral pleasure 1 and price in affecting CE is negative, it can be said the nature of this moderating effect is *buffering* (the effect of price on CE decreases of 0,13 units when visceral pleasure (1) increases of 1 unit). To compare the magnitude of the effects, a check of the standardized values (Betas) was carried out, showing that price (beta = 0,72) has a larger effect on CE than service atmosphere (beta = 0,18) and brand (beta = 0,11).

A normality test of the residuals was performed by plotting the residuals of the observed sample against the corresponding residuals of a standard normal distribution N (0,1).

The residuals don't deviate a lot from the straight line, so it is reasonable to assume that the observed sample comes from a normal distribution. A White's test to check for homoskedasticity of the residuals has been performed. The results showed the variance of the residuals is homogenous (heteroskedasticity hypothesis rejected with p-value = 0.128 > 0.05). Constant variance assumption is validated so we can trust the hypothesis testing results.

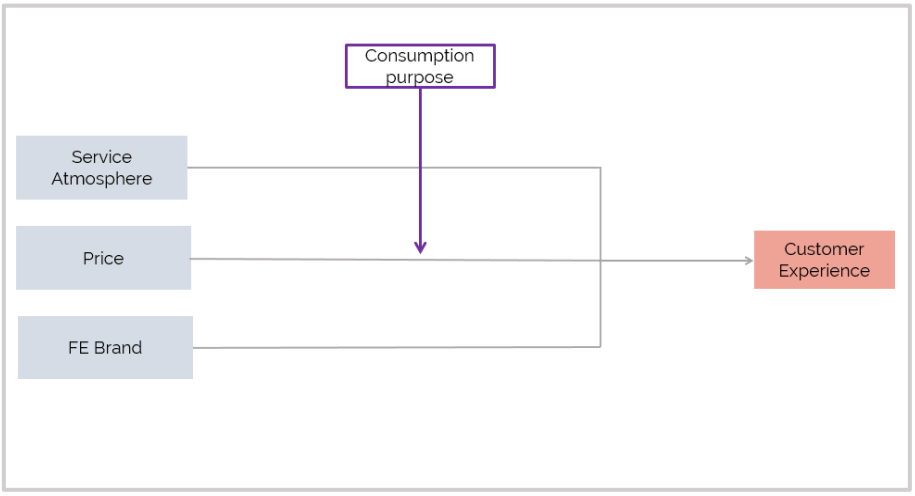
6. Conclusion

6.1 Conclusions and Discussions

The hypothesis testing by mean of the multiple regression analysis, showed the variables affecting significantly the customer experience assessment are: the perceived level of value for money and the convenience of the price deal; the perceived brand prestige of the foodservice establishment and, jointly, the perceived quality of the service and the perceived atmosphere of the foodservice establishment. In particular, the price variable was the one with the greater effect in terms of magnitude (by looking at the Betas of the regression analysis). Amongst the moderators, the visceral eating pleasure measuring the response to sensorial aspects of food (visceral pleasure 1) resulted to be the only variable to affect with significance the relationship between price perceptions and customer experience assessment. Specifically, as the tendency of the consumer to indulge visceral impulses increases, the effect of the value for money perception on customer experience decreases. This can be justified considering that consumers incline to satisfy visceral pleasure by having a consumption experience in a restaurant, derive

satisfaction mainly by the food consumption, and less by the other component of the experience (including price).

The resulting output can be resumed in a new model composed by one dependent variable, customer experience; three independent variables, service atmosphere, price, brand prestige and one moderator of price on customer experience, consumption purpose, which represents the tendency on consumers to seek for visceral eating pleasure.



6.2 Managerial Implications

Following the analysis of the results, it is reasonable to assume that knowing what the drivers of the customer experience in the away from home food consumption context are, could be useful to the management of all the Horeca channel players, from the manufacturer companies to the F&B wholesalers and, finally, to the foodservice establishments.

Knowing that the brand prestige, the service quality jointly to the restaurant atmosphere and the price are the key drivers in order to enhance the customer experience, could be an important information for those foodservice establishment players who are interested in increasing customer satisfaction, in terms of strategy development and resources allocation.

Taking into account the findings about the interaction effect of price and visceral eating pleasure on customer experience, could be also useful to formulate tailored strategies directed to those

consumers who tend to seek visceral sensorial eating pleasure (type 1). This target of consumers, more attractive than others because of the lower level of price sensitivity they experiment with respect to customer experience assessment, could be retained by means of specific strategies aimed at over-exposing the sensorial characteristics of food, to which this target is very sensitive. To make an example, assuming the existence of this moderating effect, a foodservice establishment could organize occasional cooking shows or place a staple cooking workspace on sight, where part of the process could be shown to the audience in order to stimulate visceral eating pleasure.

6.3 Scientific Implications

This thesis is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature with regard to the food consumption dynamics applied to the away from home environment. In particular, it aims to determine the effects exercised by various components of the offering and personal attitudes toward food, on customer experience.

This model, with respect to the existing literature, studies the customer experience dynamics in a specific environment, the away from home one, in reference of one category of consumption: food consumption. Most prior literature has focused on studying customer experience in the retail environment, with respect of well-known brands, and FMCG product category (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007).

With respect to the extant literature regarding the exploration of the different types of pleasure (Alba & Williams, 2013) and their connection whit food consumption (Cornil & Chandon, 2016), this study has tested the effect of epicurean eating pleasure and visceral eating pleasure on customer experience, revealing the existence of a moderating buffering effect exercised by visceral eating pleasure on the relationship between price and customer experience.