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Customer Experience in the Hotel Industry: A Systematic Literature Review and Research

Agenda

Abstract

Purpose: Academic research on customer experience (CX) in the hospitality industry has recently experienced vast growth as managers have increasingly focused on delivering distinctive experiences to their guests. Despite the relevance of this topic, studies conducted in this area within the hotel context are scarce and dispersed. This paper aims to classify the main academic studies and to present a definition of hotel CX, a conceptual model, emerging trends, and future research gaps.

Design/methodology/approach: A systematic literature review (SLR) was selected as the research methodology. Adapted from PRISMA statements, the study entailed an in-depth review of 46 articles published in English between 2006 and 2021. The articles were compiled using keyword searches in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS).

Findings: This study facilitates an understanding of the hotel CX. The conceptual framework derived from the SLR includes the entire set of antecedents, consequences, mediators, and moderators of this concept. The results also illustrate the topic's academic evolution and expose major guidelines that can help determine areas for future research.

Originality: This study adds value to the hospitality research literature via SLR. The framework of CX in the hotel industry synthesizes the existing knowledge on this topic and identifies research gaps. The proposed framework allows for the improvement of future hotel CX studies.

Keywords: Systematic literature review, Customer experience, Hotel industry, PRISMA

Article classification: Literature review

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to establish the current state of the art on customer experience (CX) in hotels through a systematic literature review (SLR). To this end, we present an SLR of the literature covering articles published over the past 15 years (from 2006 to 2021) from peer-reviewed English-language journals by applying the preferred reporting items of SLR and meta-analysis (PRISMA) statements (Moher *et al.*, 2015).

An SLR about CX considers specific contexts, such as the retail (Bascur and Rusu, 2020), service (Bueno *et al.*, 2019), hospitality and tourism sectors (Kim and So, 2022) or customer experience management (CEM) in hotels (Rahimian *et al.*, 2021). However, despite its importance for the hotel industry, no SLR specifically addresses the hotel context by deeply examining the literature on CX to propose a holistic framework for researchers.

Hotel industry is a highly competitive industry with a wide range of offers, which makes it difficult for hotel brands to differentiate themselves from the rest. Since each sector has specific characteristics that make it unique, understanding the concept of CX with a specific focus on hotels reveals gaps in the literature to help hotels design their experiences depending on the results they want to achieve. Furthermore, although previous reviews such as Kim and So (2022) analyze CX in the tourism and hospitality sectors, their study covers a wide variety of tourist activities related to accommodations, catering and restaurants, trips, travel operators and leisure activities, among others (Marrero, 2016). Although all these activities are closely related since they share characteristics related to services and are directly or indirectly linked to tourism, each has unique characteristics that generate different expectations in consumers, thus making each specific activity different from the rest.

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3 While the tangible aspects of a hotel are easily imitable, aspects such as the experience
4 are more complicated to replicate. To design experiences that are unique, it is necessary to know
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6 how experience is understood, how its dimensions affect consumer behavior and the company
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8 itself, and what can be done to provide positive experiences. This research contributes to
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10 advancing academic knowledge by guiding future research to avoid repeating studies and
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12 applying new methodologies. Table I presents the research questions of this study.
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16 [Insert Table I near here]
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22 **2. Scope and conceptualization**

23 Although CX is important for the hotel industry, experience-related research remains
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25 underrepresented. This is a critical gap, especially given the threat that sharing economy
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27 accommodations represent to the hotel industry (Mody *et al.*, 2019; Sthapit *et al.*, 2022).
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31 While it may seem a priori that customers of different types of accommodations expect
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33 the same basic services (i.e., clean rooms and comfortable beds), there are differences in terms of
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35 the attributes. Therefore, accommodations based on the sharing economy, such as Airbnb rentals,
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37 are not included because the experience of this type of accommodation consists of dimensions
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39 such as home benefits, personalized service, social interactions, and authenticity, which differ
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41 from those in hotels (Li *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, to understand how the hotel experience is
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43 defined by differentiating it from the experience of other services and designing unique
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45 experiences that may impact the consumer.
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49 The concept of “experience” appears in different expressions, such as CX (Gentile *et al.*,
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51 2007), consumer experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), service
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53 experience (Hui and Bateson, 1991), shopping experience (Kerin *et al.*, 1992) and brand
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3 experience (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Although authors often adopt different ways of naming
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5 experience, they all seem to allude to the same concept.
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8 Moreover, although most authors choose to adopt the definition and scale proposed by
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10 Brakus *et al.* (2009) to study the effect of CX on variables such as brand loyalty (Guan *et al.*,
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12 2021) or customer satisfaction (Ren *et al.*, 2018), there is no consensus on its dimensionality and
13
14 definition. Accordingly, despite varied efforts to define CX, the literature on this concept
15
16 remains complex and inconsistent, with disparate opinions on its definition, background,
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18 variables, measurement, and impacts (Cetin and Dincer, 2014). In general, the first works that
19
20 attempted to address the concept of CX were based on the theoretical perspective of brand
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22 experience derived from the works of Schmitt (1999) and Brakus *et al.* (2009). Given the
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24 growing interest, subsequent research has investigated and adapted the experience by adjusting it
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26 to the specific characteristics of each industry, such as retail (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), hotels (Khan
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28 and Rahman, 2017), and peer-to-peer accommodations (Li *et al.*, 2019).
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34 While some research has attempted to understand this experience through definitions or
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36 narratives provided by consumers themselves (Brochado *et al.*, 2020; Buehring and O'Mahony,
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38 2019), others have developed their own scales (Khan and Rahman, 2017) or used existing scales
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40 to test relationships. Some of these scales focus on specific elements of the brand, such as the
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42 physical environment or human interaction, that may impact the user, while others, such as those
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44 derived from the perspective of Brakus *et al.* (2009), focus on how the consumer feels when
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46 interacting with the brand/product but do not identify which specific aspects of the brand
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48 generate that feeling. Thus, if the scale and dimensions used by Brakus *et al.* (2009) are applied
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50 to the hotel field, it is possible to determine that a hotel or a hotel brand generates sensations and
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52 emotions and thus has an impact on the cognitive and behavioral levels, but it is unclear whether
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3 this stimulation is produced by contact with the staff, the view from the hotel or the decor and
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5 comfort level of the room. In contrast, scales such as those used by Walls *et al.* (2011) or Khan
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7 and Rahman (2017) provide more precise information about whether the cause of this
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9 stimulation is a tangible aspect, such as decor, or an intangible aspect, such as interaction with
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11 other guests or staff. Hence, an SLR focused on this specific industry is key to determining how
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13 the construct has been measured over the years and whether this approach allows us to draw the
14
15 appropriate conclusions.
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19 As stated above, each industry has its own characteristics. Thus, the use of general scales,
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21 such as the scale by Brakus *et al.* (2009), that focus on how the consumer feels but do not
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23 provide information on what specific aspect of the hotel generates these sensations does not
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25 allow hotel managers to improve the design of these experiences. It is important to know what
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27 alternatives exist to measure this construct in hotels and to determine whether these alternatives
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29 are sufficient to produce the desired outcomes.
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35 **3. Methodology**

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37 SLR should be conducted to consolidate knowledge in one domain to use state-of-the-art
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39 knowledge to avoid conducting research that does not substantially advance the field and support
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41 claims of novelty when contrasting old and new knowledge (Paul *et al.*, 2021). This process
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43 includes defining research questions as well as collecting, preparing, and analyzing data and
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45 reporting results (Paul and Barari, 2022).
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49 In this study, the procedure designed to select the preferred reporting items is based on
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51 PRISMA statements (Moher *et al.*, 2015), a useful guideline for reporting systematic reviews
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53 recognized by the scientific community (Carvalho and Alves, 2022). The use of this method
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rather than a bibliometric or solely thematic review of the literature helps to ensure that the process of selecting and analyzing articles is transparent and provides a clear reference point for others in the field, thereby distinguishing this research from previous studies on similar topics (Booth *et al.*, 2020). There are four steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 near here]

To identify all articles in the selected databases related to the topic, the search protocol focused on academic publications in peer-reviewed journals written in English without delimiting dates to identify the year that literature on CX in hotels began. The articles selected for inclusion in this paper were sourced from two online databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). Several alternative keywords were chosen to ensure that no seminal contributions were omitted from this search:

1. “Customer experience” AND hotel
2. “Consumer experience” AND hotel
3. “Brand experience” AND hotel
4. “Hotel experience”
5. “Guest experience”

In this part of the process, the total of each combination of keywords in each database resulted in the identification of 1236 articles (655 articles in Scopus and 581 in WoS).

In the screening step, the number of articles was reduced by eliminating those that were duplicated and/or did not include the keywords in their abstract. The articles were organized in an Excel sheet that contained the title, authors, journal, year of publication, abstract and purpose.

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3 The selection process drastically reduced the number of articles to be analyzed: of the 1236
4 articles identified, only 281 continued to stage 3.
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7 The eligibility step involved removing items that did not meet the inclusion and exclusion
8 criteria. To conduct this step, the abstracts were read carefully. In cases where there were doubts
9 (for example, because it was not clear whether the study focused exclusively on hotels or
10 whether the CX was treated in a general way without focusing on the specific characteristics of
11 hotels), the complete article was reviewed to determine whether it should be included in the final
12 analysis. To ensure the selection of scientific articles, inclusion and exclusion criteria were
13 defined. The selected articles were chosen according to the following eligibility criteria:
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- 23 1. Article in journal
- 24 2. English-language publication
- 25 3. Publication in peer-reviewed journal
- 26 4. Article related to the topic (customer experience in the hotel industry)
- 27 5. Title or abstract that includes the keywords

28 Articles were excluded for any of the following reasons:

- 29 1. Refers to customer experience in general and is not related to the hotel industry
- 30 2. Refers to specific accommodation types, such as country houses, bed-and-
31 breakfasts, or Airbnb rentals

32
33 After applying these eligibility criteria, all articles were saved into a Mendeley folder,
34 and any duplicates were removed. A digital spreadsheet was used to track the preliminary list of
35 articles. The final set of articles were read in full before the list was finalized. Articles that did
36 not meet the requirements were removed, reducing the number of articles from 281 to 142.
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The inclusion step addressed the number of articles that were ultimately included in the sample and subject to quantitative analysis (Booth *et al.*, 2020; Kim and So, 2022). The final sample included 46 articles for further analysis. These articles were read in depth, and all the relevant information was registered in an Excel sheet.

As a final consideration, the representativeness of the sample of articles was validated by a subsequent cross-check procedure. First, the researchers individually extracted information from the articles. After reviewing a sample of articles together, the researchers achieved agreement on what to extract from the articles and maintained frequent communication during the data extraction process, especially when there were doubts about some articles. After the researchers conducted the extraction, opinions were requested from two international academic experts in the field of tourism who previously validated the criteria in each of the phases and subsequently reviewed the final sample of selected articles.

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Publications by year

Figure 2 shows the number of publications from 2006 to 2021. During the search process, no period was defined; the earliest research that focused on this concept in the hotel industry was published by Poria (2006). Moreover, there were no salient articles published in 2007, 2010 or 2012. By 2015, the number of publications began to increase, with the highest number of relevant publications in 2019 (n=10). CX is therefore a topic that has only recently aroused a greater level of interest in the hotel industry literature; 75% of the reviewed studies were published during the period of 2017-2021.

[Insert Figure 2 near here]

4.2. Publications by journal and research methodology

Table II - Supplementary Material shows the number of publications published per journal. In general, the publications are fairly distributed among the different journals, each of which typically has one or two publications. Based on the number of articles, two journals stand out, the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* and the *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, with seven papers each. Additionally, the frequency of the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, in which four articles were published, is noteworthy.

Table III - Supplementary Material shows the classification of the methodologies used to study CX in the hotel industry. A total of 66% of the articles published in this period used a quantitative methodology (n=30) to study the phenomenon; specifically, 93% (n=28) used a survey with different modalities to collect data, while only two investigations utilized experimentation. A total of 18% of the investigations used a qualitative methodology (n=8), with interviews being the most frequently applied method to collect information (n=5). Finally, seven articles (16%) applied mixed methodologies, including surveys and interviews, to collect information. Table III includes the methodology of the analyses, with SEM and PLS-SEM being the most preferred techniques.

4.3. Conceptualization and dimensionality

1
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3 In general, there is consensus regarding the subjective and personal nature of CX, which arises as
4
5 a response to stimuli related to the hotel during the customer journey. The different definitions
6
7 are listed in Table IV- Supplementary Material.
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10 With the aim of addressing the first of our research questions, the following definition
11
12 was derived that incorporates the various aspects of CX that have been considered. CX is a
13
14 holistic, multidimensional, and highly subjective mental response (including sensations, feelings,
15
16 cognitions, and behaviors) to hotel brand stimuli that involves the customer at different levels
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18 (Kang *et al.*, 2017; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2018). It comprises a broad series of touchpoints during the
19
20 customer journey, from prepurchase expectations to post-purchase evaluations (Khan *et al.*,
21
22 2020) (i.e., the process of searching for product information, buying, and consuming products,
23
24 and then evaluating products after their consumption) (Kang *et al.*, 2017). This experience is
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26 created through a unique combination of responses to dimensions of the physical environment
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28 (i.e., hotel location, ambience, attributes) and human interaction (i.e., staff and guest-to-guest
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30 interactions), and their interpretation is subject to different situational factors.
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35 Although the authors of the reviewed articles seem to agree on a definition of CX, there
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37 is no similar consensus regarding its dimensions (Table IV). Despite these differences, in
38
39 general, two approaches can be distinguished. The first approach utilizes the theoretical
40
41 framework proposed by Brakus *et al.* (2009) to define experience. Specifically, ten of the forty-
42
43 six articles analyzed in this SLR conceptualize hotel CX based on the dimensions proposed by
44
45 Brakus *et al.* (2009): affective, cognitive, sensory, and behavioral. These articles understand CX
46
47 using abstract dimensions that are inherent to a client's subjective and internal responses rather
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49 than to factors a hotel can control, such as design or staff competence. In contrast, the second
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51 approach corresponds to authors who focus on factors a hotel company can control. It defines
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3 experience as a multidimensional concept composed of the physical environment (e.g., location,
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experience as a multidimensional concept composed of the physical environment (e.g., location, ambience, guest security, tangibles, food services) and human interaction (e.g., staff and guest-to-guest interactions).

4.4. *Antecedents and consequences*

Overall, the academic literature justifies the coexistence of different dimensions to measure CX in the context of interaction (Waqas *et al.*, 2021). However, specifically in the hotel industry, different measures have been used. In total, 17 antecedents and 31 consequences of CX were identified (Figure 3). To illustrate which variables are most relevant, we have highlighted the factors that make hospitality truly distinctive in Figure 3.

[Insert Figure 3 near here]

4.4.1. *Antecedents*

The drivers of the experiences in the reviewed articles were identified and classified into four types: behavioral, cognitive & sensory, technological, and environmental.

4.4.1.1. Behavioral drivers

This category includes variables such as autonomy (Huang *et al.*, 2019), word of mouth (WOM; Ismail, 2011) and engagement (Islam *et al.*, 2019). According to Huang *et al.* (2019, p.600), a sense of autonomy is “*the degree to which participants perceive an opportunity to engage in an activity that interests them and experience volition and freedom*”. Therefore, it is a psychological mechanism that links CX with well-being, which makes it a key variable for understanding the impact of CX on well-being. Given that customers must be engaged with a brand to create

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3 positive sensory experiences and that customer engagement occurs as a microexperience within a
4 customer's broader experience (Islam *et al.*, 2019), engagement is considered a precursor to
5 experience.
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10 11 12 4.4.1.2. Cognitive and sensory drivers 13

14 These antecedents represent the largest group, including brand reputation (Ahn and Back, 2018),
15 mindfulness (Haobin *et al.*, 2021), online experience (García *et al.*, 2018), price, core services,
16 perceived service quality (Ismail, 2011), brand innovativeness (Nysveen *et al.*, 2018), customer-
17 perceived relationship marketing (Rezaei *et al.*, 2017), and multisensory marketing (Wiedmann
18 *et al.*, 2018). Some of these variables, such as multisensory marketing, price, core services, brand
19 reputation and brand innovativeness, are controllable by a company since it can take actions to
20 influence them (Islam and Rahman, 2016). Brand reputation is defined as the “*aggregate*
21 *perception of outsiders on the salient characteristics of general tourism image or brand*” (Ahn
22 and Back, 2018, p.3029). Together with brand innovativeness, i.e., the inclination of a company
23 to adopt new ideas for the development of new products (Nysveen *et al.*, 2018), brand reputation
24 can positively influence customers’ overall perception of the brand. Price serves as a variable to
25 inform decisions and expectations about a service to be received and may be an indicator of CX,
26 like the way core services directly affect the quality of a service as well as CX (Ismail, 2011).
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47 4.4.1.3. Technological drivers 48

49 This set of antecedents includes variables such as a sense of presence, preview mode (Bogicevic
50 *et al.*, 2019) and robot service (Chan and Tung, 2019). According to Bogicevic *et al.* (2019), a
51 sense of presence represents the psychological effect of the feeling of presence in a nonphysical
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space; thus, customers who sense a superior presence will have a richer experience. Chan and Tung (2019) also argue that service robots can impact consumers on cognitive, affective, intellectual, and behavioral levels.

4.4.1.4. Environmental drivers

This is the smallest group and includes factors related to the environment, such as green image (Nysveen *et al.*, 2018) and environmental sustainability (Moliner *et al.*, 2019).

4.4.2. Continuous consequences

Consequences have been studied to a greater extent than antecedents since a greater number of variables have been identified (31), and some have been evaluated across various studies. Thus, consequences have been grouped into three categories: affective/hedonic, cognitive and behavioral.

4.4.2.1. Affective/hedonic consequences

This category includes emotions (Ali *et al.*, 2015; Huang *et al.*, 2019), brand loyalty (Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown, 2018; Cetin and Dincer, 2014; Guan *et al.*, 2021; Huang *et al.*, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2020; Manthiou *et al.*, 2016; Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018), brand attachment (Gómez-Suárez and Veloso, 2020; Kang *et al.*, 2017), meaningfulness, well-being (Mody *et al.*, 2017), pleasure, arousal (Mody *et al.*, 2019), positive electronic-WOM (eWOM), motivation (concern for others) (Pourabedin and Migin, 2015) and customer delight (Lee and Park, 2019).

4.4.2.2. Cognitive consequences

Cognitive consequences include satisfaction (Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown, 2019; Bravo *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021a; Çoban and Yetiş, 2019; Moliner *et al.*, 2019; Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018; Nysveen *et al.*, 2018; Ren *et al.*, 2016, 2018; Rezaei *et al.*, 2017), attitude toward the hotel chain (Bravo *et al.*, 2018), brand equity (García *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Park, 2019), brand knowledge (Kang *et al.*, 2017; Manthiou *et al.*, 2016), brand trust (Kang *et al.*, 2017), brand power (Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018), perceived value (Ren *et al.*, 2018; Walls, 2013; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2018), and service quality (Yoon and Lee, 2017).

4.4.2.3. Behavioral consequences

This category comprises behavioral intention (Ahn and Back, 2018), WOM (Cetin and Dincer, 2014; Gómez-Suárez and Veloso, 2020; Pourabedin and Migin, 2015), information sharing (Chen *et al.*, 2021a), revisit intention (Khan and Rahman, 2017; Mhlanga, 2017; Mutsikiwa *et al.*, 2020), and actual spending behavior (Rezaei *et al.*, 2017). Among all the consequences identified, satisfaction is primary; up to ten investigations have studied the effect of CX and its dimensions on customer satisfaction. Loyalty (n=7) ranks second, followed by perceived value (n=3), WOM (n=3), brand knowledge (n=2) and brand attachment (n=2). The rest of the variables were only identified in an investigation as a result of CX.

4.4.3. Customer or company perspective

The consequences of these variables were classified according to the customer or company perspective.

4.4.3.1. Customer perspective

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3 This is the largest group of consequences; thus, it can be concluded that the effects of CX are
4 more visible in aspects related to the client than in aspects related to the brand or the hotel.
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7 Consumer-related consequences of CX include emotions (Ali *et al.*, 2015; Huang *et al.*, 2019),
8 brand loyalty (Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown, 2018; Cetin and Dincer, 2014; Guan *et al.*, 2021;
9 Huang *et al.*, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2020; Manthiou *et al.*, 2016; Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018),
10 attachment to the brand (Gómez-Suárez and Veloso, 2020; Kang *et al.*, 2017), meaningfulness,
11 well-being (Mody *et al.*, 2017), pleasure, excitement (Mody *et al.*, 2019), e-WOM (concern for
12 others, helping the hotel) (Pourabedin and Migin, 2015), customer delight (Lee and Park, 2019),
13 satisfaction (Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown, 2019; Bravo *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021a; Çoban
14 and Yetiş, 2019; Moliner *et al.*, 2019; Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018; Nysveen *et al.*, 2018; Ren
15 *et al.*, 2016, 2018; Rezaei *et al.*, 2017), attitude toward the hotel chain (Bravo *et al.*, 2018), trust
16 in the brand (Kang *et al.*, 2017), perceived value (Ren *et al.*, 2018; Walls, 2013; Wiedmann *et*
17 *al.*, 2018), behavioral intention (Ahn and Back, 2018), WOM (Cetin and Dincer, 2014; Gómez-
18 Suárez and Veloso, 2020; Pourabedin and Migin, 2015), information exchange (Chen *et al.*,
19 2021a), revisit intention (Khan and Rahman, 2017; Mhlanga, 2017; Mutsikiwa *et al.*, 2020), and
20 actual spending behavior (Rezaei *et al.*, 2017).
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4.4.3.2. Company perspective

42 This is the least numerous group of consequences and takes into account how providing pleasant
43 experiences to customers can have a direct impact on aspects related to the company, such as
44 brand value (García *et al.*, 2018; Lee and Park, 2019), brand awareness, (Kang *et al.*, 2017;
45 Manthiou *et al.*, 2016), brand power (Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018), and quality of service
46 (Yoon and Lee, 2017).
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4.4.4. *Factors with a double role as antecedents and consequences*

Variables such as WOM are both antecedents and consequences of CX. CX comprises a broad series of touchpoints during the customer journey ranging from pre-purchase expectations to post-purchase evaluations (Khan *et al.*, 2020) and that occur during the process of searching for product information, buying and consuming products, and evaluating products after their consumption (Kang *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that they are both antecedents and consequences because academic research has often examined WOM as both a fundamental aspect of decision-making and an outcome of the purchasing process. Specifically, in the hotel sector, word of mouth is a powerful source of influence that helps customers predict their experience (Ismail, 2011); this makes WOM an antecedent of experience. Therefore, reading positive reviews helps future customers have a positive predisposition toward a hotel. On the other hand, CX can favor the generation of WOM if positive emotions are generated in the client and provide value during the stay, which generates satisfaction and encourages the client to talk about the brand (Sabiote and Ballester, 2011).

As a final consideration regarding the coincidence between mediators, antecedents and consequences, it should be noted that to examine the mediation relationship, a previous significant relationship between the two variables is necessary; that is, the independent variable (X) affects the outcome (Y). It is also expected that X affects the proposed mediator. Thus, the mediator must influence Y when both are used as predictors (Viglia and Dolnicar, 2020).

4.5. *Mediators and moderators*

Two possible directions of mediation have been observed, namely, between antecedents and CX and between CX and its consequences. In one case (Ahn and Back, 2018), CX itself mediated the relationship between the antecedent (brand reputation) and the consequence (behavioral intention). In total, 7 mediators between CX and its consequences have been identified: intelligence operation, memorability, brand attachment, brand affect, brand trust, brand knowledge and satisfaction. Mediators of the relationship between antecedents and CX include mindfulness, sense of presence, mental imagery, and perceived service quality. Similarly, moderators have been identified in relation to antecedents and CX and between CX and its consequences. Once again, numerous moderators (n=7) were found in the relationship between CX and consequences, specifically, social distance, event interruption, brand involvement, gender, loyalty card membership, incident recovery and age. In the relationship between background and CX, moderators related to the characteristics of a trip and demographic variables were the length of stay, hotel segment and gender.

5. Agenda and future research

This study identified several possible future research avenues, which are presented below.

5.1. Investigation of the moderators of customer experience

Moderating variables have recently acquired special relevance in the study of consumer behavior since they help to determine the link between independent and dependent variables (Khan *et al.*, 2020). The hotel type can be distinguished into three categories, luxury, midscale, or budget, which can moderate guests' evaluations of brand experiences (Chan and Tung, 2019). Given that the expectations and evaluations of an experience may differ depending on the reason for a trip

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3 or whether an accommodation is at a resort or a less expensive facility, analyzing the impact of
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5 hotel type can improve the evaluation of the relationship between CX and its antecedents or
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7 consequences, especially when more abstract scales are used to measure CX. Such an analysis
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10 can also foster the design of better experiences according to the type of tourist or the type of
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12 hotel. Ismail (2011) noted that empirical research exists on different types of tourists. Moreover,
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14 Khan *et al.* (2020) highlighted the importance of studying the moderating role of variables such
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16 as domestic hotel brands vs. international hotel brands, domestic customers and international
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18 customers, and the purpose of a stay. It would be useful to identify more moderating variables
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20 between background and experience since the impacts of only three such variables, namely, the
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22 hotel segment, length of stay and gender, have been analyzed to date. Future research could
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24 bridge this gap by analyzing the moderating role of variables such as age, previous experience,
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26 nationality, personal characteristics or even the type of destination itself.
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33 **5.2. Investigation of the mediator of customer experience**

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35 This SLR reveals that it is necessary to examine the mechanisms that mediate the relationship
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37 between experience and its antecedents and between background and experience since only four
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39 such variables have been investigated: mindfulness (Haobin *et al.*, 2021), sense of presence and
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41 mental imagery (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2019) and perceived service quality (Ismail, 2011). Moreover,
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43 to date, the perception of a hotel as technologically developed has been shown to have a positive
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45 effect (but not a mediating effect) only on experience variables, such as sense of presence
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47 (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2019), preview mode (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2019), and robot service (Chan and
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49 Tung, 2019). Despite the importance that customers place on comments, reviews and content
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51 shared on social media when planning a trip, little is known about how this information affects
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3 the hotel experience. Therefore, it is important to determine which variables mediate the
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5 relationship with CX in the online environment. Finally, in only one case (Ahn and Back, 2018),
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7 CX in the hotel setting was analyzed as a mediator between brand reputation and behavioral
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9 intention. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze when and between which variables the hotel
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11 experience itself can function as a mediating variable.
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17 ***5.3. Need to investigate negative customer experience***

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19 Another trend that can be observed from the review is that existing research focuses on analyzing
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21 the impact or background of positive experience. However, little is known about what
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23 consequences a negative experience in a hotel may have and what variables may be the cause of
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25 negative experiences. Therefore, as noted in regard to brand hate (Yadav and Chakrabarti, 2022),
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27 it would be interesting to examine how to improve both CX and its impact as well as how to
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29 avoid generating negative experiences.
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35 ***5.4. Need to investigate antecedents of customer experience (behavioral, environmental, and*** 36 37 ***technological drivers)***

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39 Seventeen antecedents of CX in hotels have been identified. However, the vast majority (i.e., up
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41 to eleven) are cognitive and sensory drivers, and no affective antecedents have been found.
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43 Could attachment, brand loyalty or emotion, in addition to a consequence antecedent such as
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45 experience, function similarly to WOM? It is necessary to examine the background related to the
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47 environment, sustainability and new technologies since research is still scarce and the new
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49 paradigm of smart tourism in recent years has encouraged companies to make significant
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51 investments in advanced technologies (Soares *et al.*, 2021), such as the Internet of the Things
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(Pelet *et al.*, 2021), big data analytics (Zarezadeh *et al.*, 2022) and chatbots (Jiménez-Barreto *et al.*, 2021), among others.

5.5. Methodological development

There is an excessive use of surveys as a data collection method, while other methodologies, such as experimentation, are rarely used. Accordingly, it is necessary to apply more innovative techniques or mixed methodologies that allow the phenomenon to be studied more completely and improve the precision and reliability of the results (Chen *et al.*, 2021b). Neurophysiological methods, for example, could be used to measure emotions during CX, offering new insights for understanding customer behavior (Verhulst *et al.*, 2020). Experimental designs could also confirm relationships that have thus far been proven only through structural equations (Khan *et al.*, 2020). Finally, the research would be enriched by applying netnography, social listening (Kim and So, 2022) or big data (Xiang *et al.*, 2015) techniques to analyze content published on social networks regarding CX.

5.6. Social media and customer experience

Despite the importance of social networks and their relevance to the hotel industry, in which they represent a key platform for sharing experiences and even searching for information that facilitates decision-making (Leung *et al.*, 2015), no studies have analyzed CX in the hotel industry from this perspective. Therefore, future research must answer questions such as the following: How should CX be communicated on social networks? Which social network has the greatest impact on CX? Can affective bonds be created by communicating other guests' CX on social networks? How can e-WOM behaviors be encouraged on social networks through CX, and

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3 how do comments related to CX on such networks affect hotel decision-making? This need to
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5 examine the relationship between CX and social media has been noted by other authors, such as
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7 Waqas *et al.* (2021).
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10 11 12 **5.7. Theoretical development research** 13

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15 Among the 46 articles reviewed, only five theories were used as a framework to study CX in the
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17 hotel industry: Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory (n=2) (Haobin *et al.*, 2021; Mody *et*
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19 *al.*, 2017), SERVQUAL (n=2) (Mhlanga, 2017, 2018), hierarchy of effects theory, signaling
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21 theory and categorization theory (n=1) (Bravo *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is important for future
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23 research to incorporate a theoretical basis that provides a multidisciplinary approach to the
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25 concept. The integration of theories from the fields of information technology or psychology is
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27 recommended to facilitate a better understanding of CX. For example, consumer culture theory
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29 (Waqas *et al.*, 2021, p.138) has been adopted by some authors to explain CX with stimuli related
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31 to social networks (Tafesse, 2016; Waqas *et al.*, 2021). Other theories that could be applied to
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33 the study of CX in the hotel industry are interactivity (Rafaeli, 1988), congruence (Osgood and
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35 Tannenbaum, 1955), and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).
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42 43 **6. Conclusions** 44

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46 Although CX is especially relevant to the hotel industry, to date, this concept has not been
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48 examined in this specific context, and this research remains in its infancy (Rahimian *et al.*,
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50 2021). The variety of studies on this phenomenon in various sectors contribute to a better
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52 understanding of CX, which has attracted the attention of academics. However, it remains an
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54 incipient concept, and more research is required to achieve greater consensus regarding its
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conceptualization and dimensionality and to shed light on the mediating and moderating variables of the relationship between CX and other variables (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Waqas *et al.*, 2021). No previous studies have provided a conceptual framework for CX in the hotel industry, including a set of factors identified as moderators, mediators, antecedents, and consequences. This study illuminates the conceptualization of hotel CX by proposing a holistic approach that serves as a guideline for the research agenda.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to theory in several ways. First, the analysis provides a better understanding of the CX concept applied to hotel industry and the dimensions it comprises. Second, the current study reveals the excessive use of the survey format as a research approach, which opens the door to the use of different methodologies. Third, previously identified factors related to hotel CX are compiled, which significantly improves the understanding of its impact on other variables and vice versa. Fourth, antecedents and consequences of CX are classified by applying two different criteria. Fifth, the analysis of the definitions and dimensions of experience reveals the existence of two lines of research. The first is a more generic one that focuses on how the consumer feels during the experience, which includes all studies that use the scales and dimensions proposed by Brakus *et al.* (2009), Schmitt (1999) and Pine and Gilmore (1998) as a theoretical framework. A second line of research includes works such as Walls *et al.* (2011), Khan and Rahman (2017) and Brochado *et al.* (2020) that focus on specific aspects of the hotel and how they affect the customer. This information can help scholars design models by considering where they want to focus their attention, i.e., on the client or on the attributes of the hotel. Sixth, after analyzing all the proposed definitions, a conceptualization of CX that is

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2
3 focused on the specific characteristics of the hotel industry is defined. This definition is useful
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5 since it includes the most important aspects of previous definitions in the hotel context to date,
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7 suggesting that it is complete. Seventh, important gaps are detected in the literature, such as the
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9 scarcity of studies on the impact of sustainability and new technologies in the hotel experience.
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11 This information cannot be concluded based on the study of Kim and So (2022) because in that
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13 case, seventeen technological drivers were found in the hospitality sector while only three were
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15 found in the hotel industry. This leads us to another contribution of this work with respect to that
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17 of Kim and So (2022): while those authors analyze the entire industry with very different market
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19 products from the perspective of both the reference market (segments) and the function served or
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21 technology, the present work, which is limited to a much less generalist field, allows us to
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23 identify the most specific gaps and facilitate more "actionable" recommendations, thus opening
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25 lines of research that could easily be ignored in broader and more diverse reference markets. In
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27 addition, as those authors state, their research consists of the analysis of articles' titles, abstracts,
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29 and keywords to conduct qualitative content analysis; they suggest that future work should
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31 include full-text papers to identify broader aspects of CX. Unlike the research of Kim and So
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33 (2022), this study analyzed the full text of relevant articles.
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42 **6.2. Practical implications**

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44 This study provides relevant information to hotel managers regarding how to design satisfactory
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46 experiences. In addition, the compilation of consequences improves understanding of the
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48 positive effects of providing pleasant experiences. Another important contribution is our
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50 collection of moderating variables, which can help improve the design of experiences, offers and
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52 promotions. Understanding the background and consequences can give hotel managers an
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3 important competitive advantage and help them understand how to design experiences and more
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5 efficiently exploit aspects such as sustainability, innovation, brand reputation, WOM, or the
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7 online experience. For example, if a hotel has a green image (Nysveen *et al.*, 2018) or
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9 emphasizes environmental sustainability (Moliner *et al.*, 2019), it should integrate these factors
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11 into the CX, such as through the design and decoration of its rooms or with informative
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13 brochures explaining how the customer's stay in this hotel generated a less negative impact on
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15 the environment. This will have a positive effect on the customer, which in turn will have a
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17 positive impact on the customer's experience with the brand. Hotels could also highlight
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19 innovation as a differentiating element of CX in their communication campaigns, thereby
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21 providing their customers with a favorable predisposition and advanced knowledge of some
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23 innovations that could improve their CX.
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31 **6.3. Limitations and future research**

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33 Our search and compilation of articles was conducted only with WoS and Scopus. Future
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35 research could extend the search to other relevant databases. While the PRISMA approach, a
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37 replicable and rigorous criterion, was employed to collect the sample of studies, the selection of
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39 46 articles may not exhaust all the marketing literature on the concept. Future research could
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41 employ other techniques, such as meta-analysis or bibliometric analysis, or evaluate CX in other
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43 industries to compare results concerning the conceptualization, dimensions, background, and
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45 consequences of CX in different industries. In addition, it would be interesting for future
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47 research to examine the differences and similarities between leisure and business travelers'
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49 experiences in hotels.
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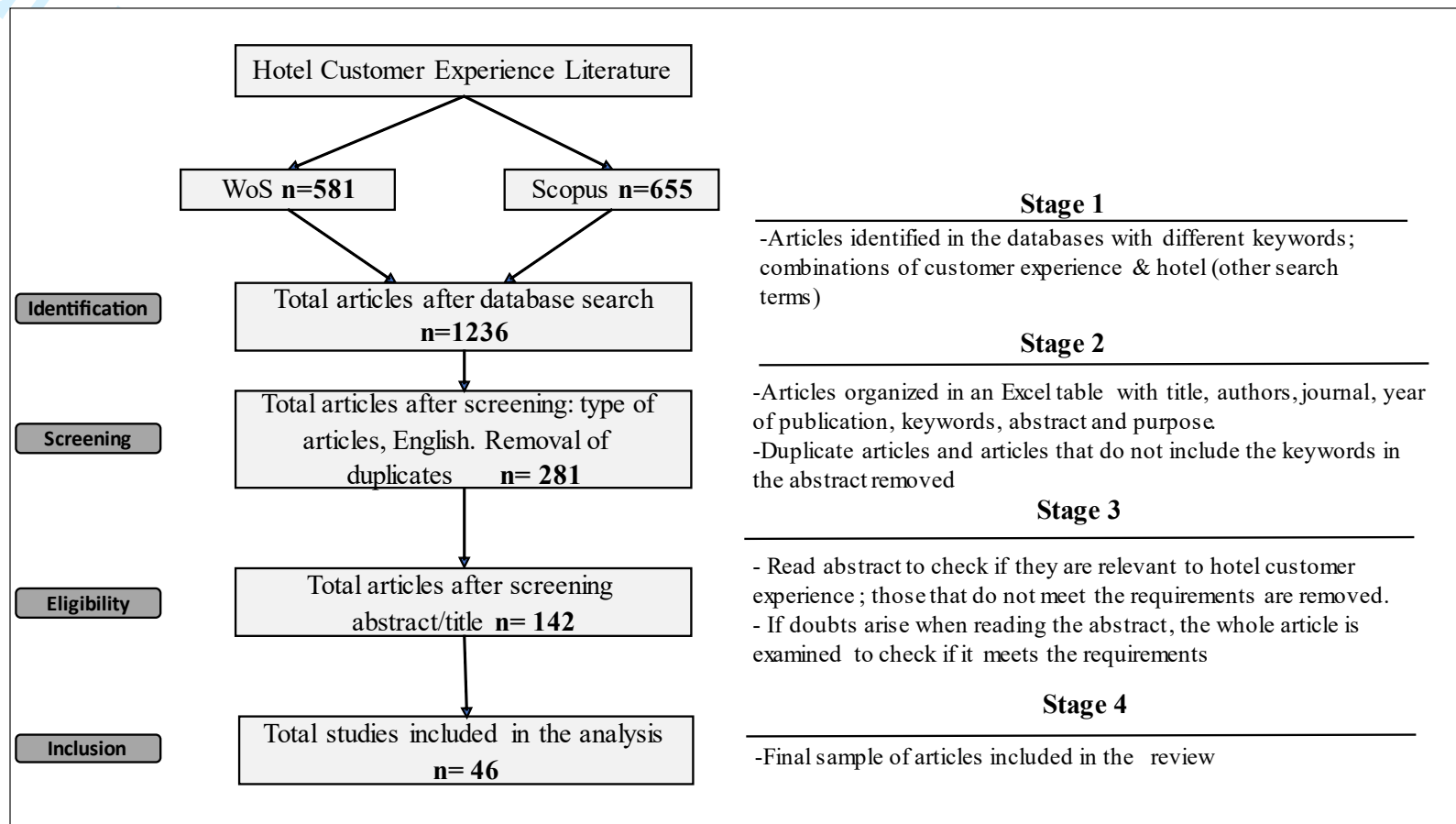


Figure 1. Study selection process.

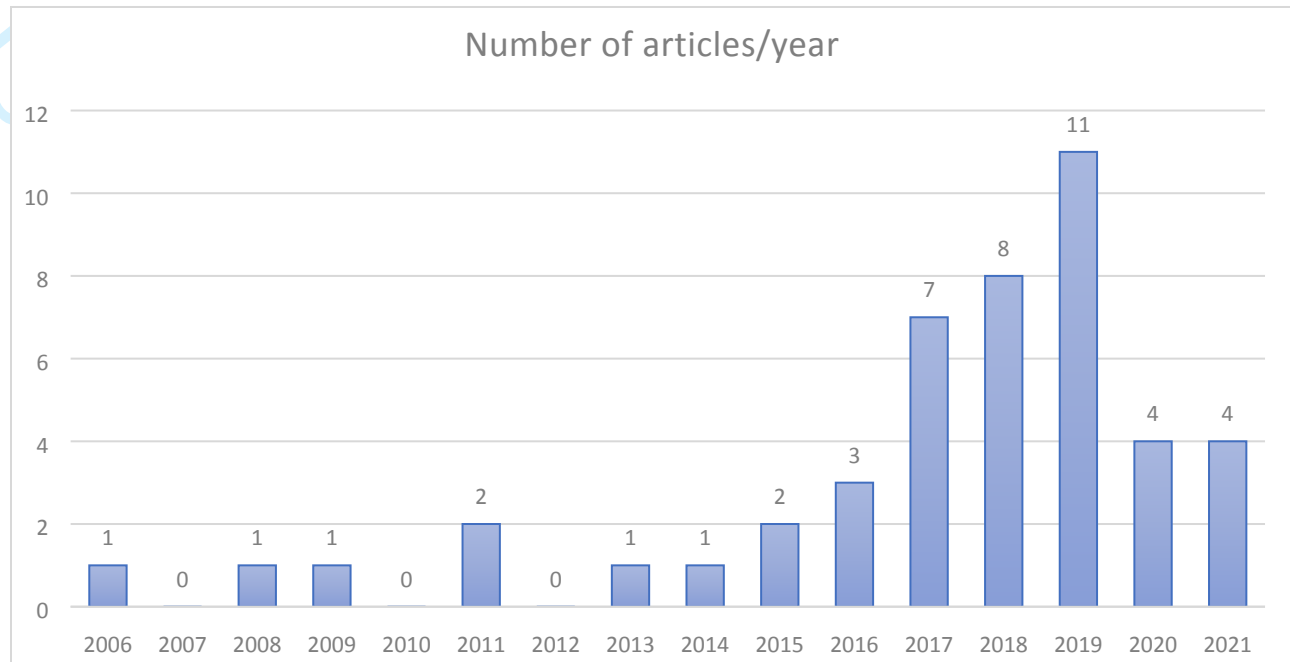


Figure 2. Articles published per year.

Figure 3. Summary model of customer experience in the hotel industry.

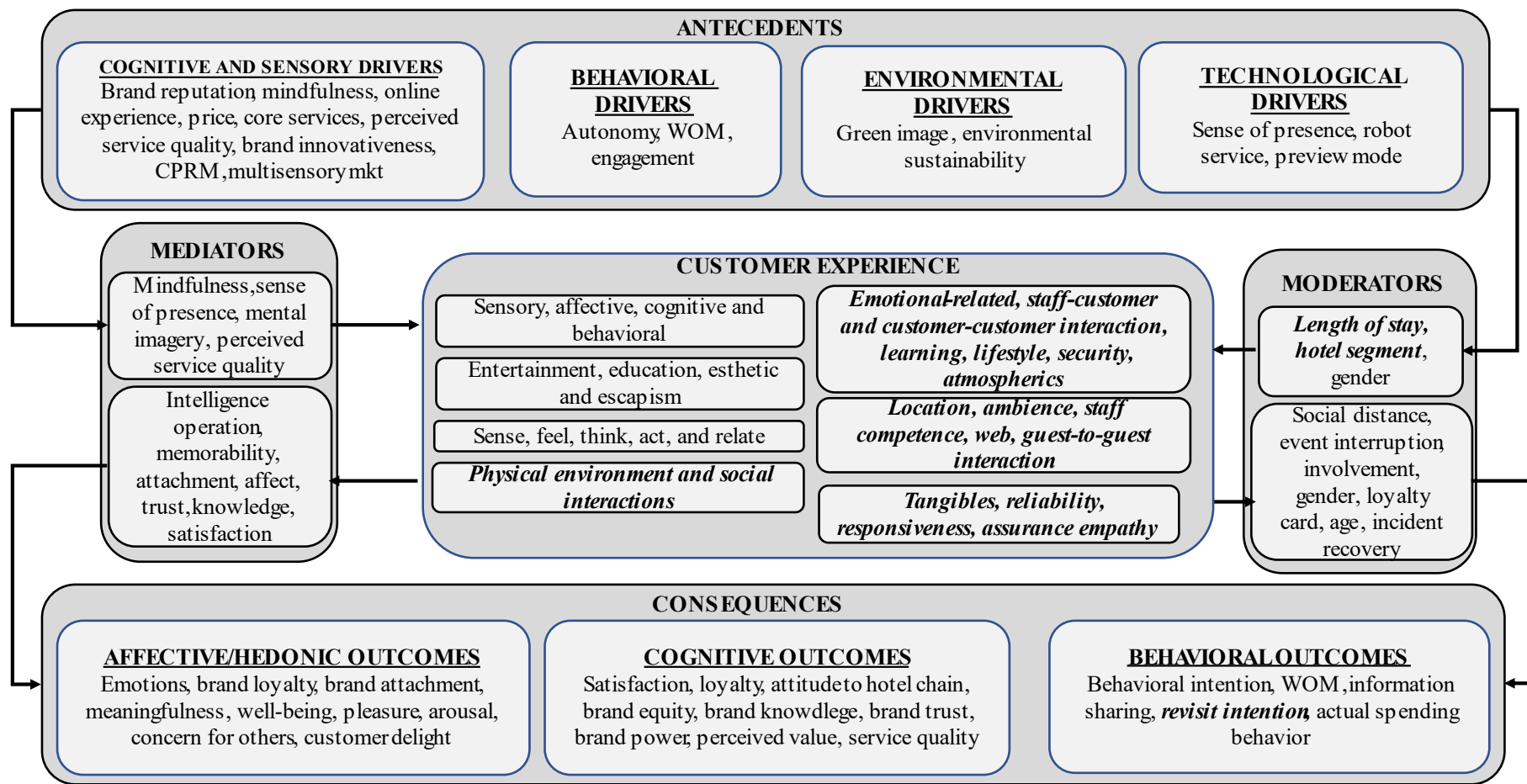


Table I. Research questions

| <i>ID</i> | <i>Research Questions</i> |
|-----------|--|
| RQ1 | How is customer experience defined in the hotel industry? |
| RQ2 | What are the dimensions of customer experience in the hotel industry? |
| RQ3 | Are there antecedent and/or consequential variables of customer experience in the hotel industry? If so, what are they? |
| RQ4 | Are there variables that moderate or mediate the relationship between the hotel experience and its consequences? If so, what are they? |
| RQ5 | What are the methods used to evaluate customer experience in the hotel industry? |

Table II. Number of articles per journal.

| Journal | Number of publications |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>Acta Commercii</i> | 1 |
| <i>African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure</i> | 2 |
| <i>Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos</i> | 1 |
| <i>Anatolia</i> | 1 |
| <i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</i> | 2 |
| <i>Current Issues in Tourism</i> | 1 |
| <i>European Journal of Tourism Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Business Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | 7 |
| <i>International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | 4 |
| <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Wine Business Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Business Economics and Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of China Tourism Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management</i> | 7 |
| <i>Journal of Relationship Marketing</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing</i> | 2 |
| <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | 1 |
| <i>Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC</i> | 2 |
| <i>Sustainability</i> | 1 |
| <i>Tourism Management</i> | 2 |
| Total | 46 |

Table III. Number of articles per research methodology.

| Research method | N° of articles | N° of articles | N° of articles | Authors |
|-----------------|----------------|--|----------------|---|
| Quantitative | 30 | Survey | 28 | Ahn and Back (2018); Ali <i>et al.</i> (2015); Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown (2019); Haobin <i>et al.</i> (2021); Bravo <i>et al.</i> (2018); Cetin and Dincer (2014); Chen <i>et al.</i> (2021a); Çoban and Yetiş (2019); García <i>et al.</i> (2018); Gómez-Suárez and Veloso (2020); Huang <i>et al.</i> (2019); Kang <i>et al.</i> (2017); Khan and Rahman (2017); Knutson <i>et al.</i> (2009); Lee and Park (2019); Manthiou <i>et al.</i> (2016); Mody <i>et al.</i> (2017); Moliner <i>et al.</i> (2019); Nobar and Rostamzadeh (2018); Nysveen <i>et al.</i> (2018); Pourabedin and Migin (2015); Ren <i>et al.</i> (2016); Rezaei <i>et al.</i> (2017); Islam <i>et al.</i> (2019); Walls (2013); Wiedmann <i>et al.</i> (2018); Yoon and Lee (2017); Youn <i>et al.</i> (2019) |
| | | Experiment | 2 | Bogicevic <i>et al.</i> (2019); Chan and Tung (2019) |
| Qualitative | 7 | Content analysis | 1 | Brochado <i>et al.</i> (2020) |
| | | Delphi | 1 | Buehring and O'Mahony (2019) |
| | | Interviews | 5 | Cetin and Walls (2016); Poria (2006); Sthapit (2019); Walls <i>et al.</i> (2011); Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2008) |
| | | Interpretive structural modeling (ISM) | 1 | Khan and Rahman (2017) (a) |
| Mixed | 8 | Interview and survey | 8 | Guan <i>et al.</i> (2021); Ismail (2011); Khan and Rahman (2017) (b); Li <i>et al.</i> (2021); Mhlanga (2017, 2018); Mutsikiwa <i>et al.</i> (2020); Ren <i>et al.</i> (2016) |
| Total | | | 46 | |

Table IV. Definitions and dimensions of Customer Experience in Hospitality**Industry**

| Author | Definition | Dimensions |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Ahn and Back (2018) | Captures the individual's internal subjective response to the contact with the integrated resort brand. | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Ali <i>et al.</i> (2015) | The final stage where the service providers focus on staging unforgettable satisfactory experiences by adding value to their offerings in order to be successful | Entertainment, education, esthetic and escapism |
| Alnawas <i>et al.</i> (2019) | Customer cognitive and emotional assessment of direct and indirect contacts with the service organisation, physical environment, and social environment, coupled with the psychological, symbolic and cognitive outcomes accorded to the customer from specific encounters. | Emotional-related, staff-customer interaction, customer-customer interaction, learning, lifestyle, guest security, and atmospherics |
| Ben Haobin <i>et al.</i> (2021) | Set of cognitive and behavioral responses to brand-related stimuli | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Bogicevic <i>et al.</i> 2019 | Internal, subjective response to contact with the hotel brand virtual stimuli | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Bravo <i>et al.</i> 2018 | Complex construct that may encompass many variables related to the customer's sensory experience, feelings during the experience and concurrent and subsequent appraisals | Service perceptions servicescape and Emotions |
| Brochado <i>et al.</i> (2020) | | Lodging, scenery, food services, staff, wine, transportation and recommendation. |
| Buehring and O'Mahony (2019) | Experiences are inherently personal and evoke emotions on psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual level | Services, atmosphere, culture, technology and sensory |
| Cetin and Dincer (2014) | Multidimensional outcomes that occur in response to some interaction with servicescape and/or service provider | Physical environment and social interactions |
| Cetin, and Walls (2016) | | Physical environment and social interactions |
| Chan and Tung (2019) | Perception of the consumers during moments of contact with a brand including consumers' subjective, internal, and behavioral responses from a brand stimuli | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Chen <i>et al.</i> (2021a) | | Sense, feel, think, action, and relate |
| çoban and yetiş (2019) | Events and moments which are personal, memorable and involve the perception and participation of customers, engage customers emotionally, and are shared with others | Esthetics, escape, education and entertainment. |
| García <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Individual's subjective and internally evaluation of the offering activities linked to the senses that are conducive to experimentation and action | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Gómez-Suárez and Veloso (2020) | The subjective and internal responses of each consumer toward brand-related stimuli at each point of interaction | Location, ambience, staff and web |
| Guan <i>et al.</i> (2021) | Customer experience in the full-service hotel sector is a multidimensional construct based on functional, affective a social dimension and involves internal feeling of an individual aroused by external stimuli | Functional, affective and social |
| Huang <i>et al.</i> (2019) | | Esthetics, escape, education and entertainment. |
| Ismail 2011 | Individual's consumption of and interaction with products or services that involve significant affection | Educational, novelty, and relational aspects and sense of beauty |
| Khan <i>et al.</i> (2020) | A comprehensive series of touchpoints that formulate customer journey, generally it starts from pre-purchase expectations to post-purchase assessments. Consumers interpret these events in a subjective and personal way that signals their cultural and social backgrounds and economic status | Hotel location, hotel staff competence, hotel stay, and ambience, hotel website and social media, and guest-to-guest experience |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Khan and Rahman 2017 (b) | A set of feelings, sensations, thoughts and behavioral responses toward hotel brand-related stimuli that are integral to the hotel brand's location, ambience, staff competence, website and social media presence and guest-to-guest interaction | Hotel location, hotel staff competence, hotel stay, and ambience, hotel website and social media, and guest-to-guest experience |
| Manthiou <i>et al.</i> (2015) | A holistic concept captures takeaway impression formed by consumers' encounters with products, services and businesses. This impression is stored in consumers' memory and is presented in the form of both objective and subjective knowledge | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Mhlanga (2018) | | Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy |
| Mhlanga (2017) | | Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy |
| Mody <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Highly personal, subjectively perceived, intangible, ever fleeting and continuously on-going" | Entertainment, education, escapism and esthetics, serendipity, localness, communitas and personalization |
| Mody <i>et al.</i> (2019) | A phenomenon that involves the consumer's subjective evaluation of the cognitive, affective, and relational interaction with the item consumed, is the ultimate point of brand differentiation in today's overcrowded marketplace | Entertainment, education, escapism and esthetics |
| Moliner <i>et al.</i> (2019) | Customer's assessment of the multiple interactions with their accommodation, from pre-consumption, through consumption to post-consumption, affected by each episode in the interaction with the hospitality industry (customer journey). | Cognitive, affective, behavioral, sensory, and social. |
| Mutsikiwa <i>et al.</i> (2020) | An experience is regarded as the impression that consumers form in their minds after encountering a brand offer | Location, ambience, staff competence, web, guest-to-guest interaction |
| Nobar <i>et al.</i> , (2018) | The client's subjective and inside reaction to any immediate or backhanded contact reaction to the contact the firm | Physical and emotional |
| Nysveen <i>et al.</i> 2018 | Subjective mental response (sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral) evoked by brand stimuli | Sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral and relational |
| Poria 2006 | | Staff, hotel attributes, environment and locality |
| Pourabedin and Migin (2015) | An individualized concept resulting from interaction with the different dimensions of a context created by a service provider | Environment, convenience, and incentive |
| Ren <i>et al.</i> (2018) | A holistic construct which includes subjectvie percepcion and responses to hedonic and aesthetic criteria | Tangible and sensorial experience, staff aspect, aesthetic perception, and location |
| Ren <i>et al.</i> (2016) | A subjective perception that is felt from within. It also relies heavily on consumption context | Tangible-sensorial experience, staff relational/interactional experience, aesthetic perception, and location. |
| Rezaei <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand relation | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Ul Islam <i>et al.</i> (2019) | Customer subjective mental response (sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral) evoked by brand stimuli during customer journey | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |
| Walls (2013) | A unique blend of many individual elements that come together and may involve the consumer emotionally, physically, and intellectually | Physical environment and the human interaction |
| Walls (2011) | Consumer experiences are derived through a unique combination of responses to physical environment dimensions and human interaction dimensions which interpretation is subject to a number of situational factors | Physical environment and the human interaction |
| Wiedmann <i>et al.</i> (2018) | Holistic, multidimensional and highly subjective response, encompassing the customer at different levels | Affective, cognitive, sensory and behavioural |

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|----|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|
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| 3 | Yoon and Lee | Unique and spontaneous response to certain stimuli relevant to | Sense, feel, think, and act |
| 4 | (2017) | hotel services that embrace direct interactions, one's own | |
| 5 | | psychological change, and self-enriching experiences | |
| 6 | Youn <i>et al.</i> | Internal, subjective response to contact with direct and indirect the | Sensory, affective, |
| 7 | (2019) | hotel brand stimuli | cognitive, behavioral and |
| 8 | | | social |
| 9 | Zhang <i>et al.</i> | Customer's way to engage functional, emotional and phsync-social | Cognitive, affective and |
| 10 | (2008) | levels in the consumption of the product or service making the | behavioral, |
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