AESTHETIC GUEST EXPERIENCE IN RESTAURANT: A STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.31410/EMAN.S.P.2021.135

Abstract: The concept of customer experience has received considerable attention in various disciplines, particularly in tourism and hospitality research. However, the aesthetic guest experience has hardly been investigated in previous studies. Aesthetics involves what makes an object beautiful and what people feel when they encounter a beautiful object. Dining experience encompasses almost all senses together, which makes it difficult to measure this concept properly. Considering the important role of aesthetics in the dining experience, this study provides a review and synthesis of the literature to establish a foundation for the conceptual framework for measuring the aesthetic guest experience in restaurants. The main objectives of this study are to categorise and summarise the research on aesthetic guest experience, present a new conceptualization and conceptual model of the aesthetic guest experience in restaurants, and highlight the emerging trends and gaps in the literature. The findings of this study contribute to aesthetic theory and offer practical implications for restaurant managers regarding all aesthetic components that should be considered when designing a memorable aesthetic restaurant experience.

Keywords: Experience economy, Aesthetic experience, Restaurant, Content analysis, Descriptive analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there have been structural changes in the elements of demand (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), which occur due to the development of technological achievements, where society is no longer satisfied with the classic offer of products and services, but strives to create memorable experiences. Therefore, it can be said that there has been a transition from a service economy to an experience economy.

Experience, however, is a complex, multidimensional concept. It has roots in many fields and disciplines (Beard & Russ, 2017), but this article will focus on experience in tourism and hospitality, as one of the social disciplines that have expansive growth in the market. In the hospitality industry, many academics have studied the impact of the dining experience on revenue, concluding that applying a sensory experience strategy can significantly increase catering revenue (Rozendaal & Schifferstein, 2010). Voss (2004) pointed out that experiences create strong emotional connections that serve as a powerful tool for branding and product differentiation in the marketplace.

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Due to the importance of achieving a positive experience for the guests, the so-called 4E model was created (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), which includes four basic dimensions: (1) entertainment, (2) education, (3) aesthetic and (4) escape. In the last few years, there has been increasing competition in the restaurant industry to achieve an aesthetic experience for guests. Consequently, there was a need to determine its components. The term "aesthetics" has been used since Baumgarten in the 18th century when the community started to discuss the human feeling for the essence of beauty (Horng & Hsu, 2020). Since then, researchers have become aware that aesthetic experience does not involve only aesthetic qualities but also aesthetic perceptions (Folkmann, 2010; Horng & Hsu, 2020). The ability to satisfy human needs for novelty and curiosity represents the hedonic quality-stimulation dimension which can be described as creative; original and innovative refers to expressive aesthetics (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004).

It is important to emphasize the relationship of the terms "aesthetics" and "restaurant experience". The need to explore the aesthetic restaurant experience as the main concept has emerged in recent years. There are only a few studies that focused specifically on aesthetic experience in restaurant context (Bekar, 2017; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021). Aesthetic experience in restaurant provides the guest with 'perceive-feel-sense' an artwork, which in turn implies the activation of sensorimotor, emotional and cognitive mechanisms and consequently determines the level of guest satisfaction (Di Dio & Vittorio, 2009).

In order to better understand the state of knowledge in the contemporary scientific literature, this paper critically examines and summarises the existing literature on aesthetic guest experience using a conceptual approach. This approach is extremely valuable in mapping the current state of knowledge on the topic by analysing previous research in terms of conceptualisations, theoretical models and research methods. As a result of this process, a new conceptual model of the aesthetic guest experience in restaurants is presented, emerging trends are discussed, and gaps in the literature are identified.

2. AIM OF THE REVIEW

The main aim of this review is to analyse the relevant scientific literature in order to identify and evaluate studies measuring aesthetic guest experience in restaurant.

The specific aims of this research are:

- (1) to define the concept of aesthetic guest experience in restaurant,
- (2) to explore models and methods for measuring aesthetic restaurant experience,
- (3)to analyse previous research on the aesthetic restaurant experience according to pre-established criteria such as author and year, country, domain, method and dimensions,
- (4)to establish a foundation for the conceptual framework for measuring the aesthetic guest experience in restaurants.

3. METHODOLOGY

Relevant scientific literature was searched by keywords such as "aesthetic restaurant experience", "restaurant experience quality" and "restaurant experience" in the following online databases: Google Scholar, Elsevier and Emerald insight.

After searching by these keywords, the papers with the previously mentioned online databases were downloaded. In the following process, elimination criteria were used to select the publication to be included in the review. Following exclusion criteria were applied:

- 1) Papers written in English language,
- 2) Papers published only in the period from 2008 to 2021,
- 3) Research applied in the context of the restaurant and focused on measuring the aesthetics in the restaurant (either as one of the dimensions of some higher constructs or as the main concept).

Following the elimination process, a total of 26 scientific articles were included in the final sample. Furthermore, the scientific research method used to analyse collected data was content analysis (Knutson et al., 2010; Volos, 2009; Wijaya et al., 2013; Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). Content analysis is conducted as qualitative research (Tkalac Verčić et al., 2010) the aim of which was to investigate the topic of aesthetic restaurant experience in order to create a conceptual framework for future measurement. The content analysis method is used to identify and capture specific content, the attributes of which are additionally analysed and included in the conceptual framework (Žugaj et al., 2006). 26 scientific studies were analysed according to predefined criteria such as author and year, country, domain, method and dimensions of the research.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the progression of 26 identified scientific articles on the topic of aesthetic guest experience in restaurants. The first part of the section presents definitions of the concept of the aesthetic restaurant experience, while the second part of the section presents a content analysis of previous research on the aesthetic restaurant experience.

4.1. The Concept of Aesthetic Restaurant Experience

Service experience is defined as the customer's direct experience of the service process, the organisation, the facilities, other customers and how the customer is treated by the service firm's representatives (Johnston & Clark, 2005). It is a mental journey that leaves the customer with memories of having performed something special, having learned something or just having fun (Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008).

Customer delight is a customer's experience of a product or service that provides an unanticipated level of value or satisfaction (Crotts & Magnini, 2011). Zeithaml (1988) in this context emphasizes the importance of the perceived value that he characterized as "overall evaluation of the benefits and costs from a customer's brand experience; consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given".

From a gastronomic industry perspective, the food service provides those experiences and feelings that individuals believe they should have on vacation (Johns & Kivela, 2008), while the experience of consuming food is defined in the literature as "pivotal behaviour that can fulfil sensory, cultural, social and epistemic motivations" (Correia et al., 2020).

After the service is provided, the restaurant guests evaluate the whole set of elements and one of them is aesthetics. In a small number of studies, the authors discussed the aesthetic compo-

nent, mainly within areas such as: the restaurant environment (Canny, 2014; Han & Ryu, 2009; Hanks & Line, 2018; Horng & Hsu, 2020; Hwang & Ok, 2013; Ryu et al., 2012; Ryu & Shawn Jang, 2008; Wu & Liang, 2009), aesthetic labour (Tsaur et al., 2015; Warhurst et al., 2000) and food aesthetics (Loporcaro et al., 2017).

Aesthetic experience is a process to perceive-feel-sense an object, represent active sensation, emotion, cognition and integrate the aesthetic pleasure appraisal (Di Dio & Vittorio, 2009). Likewise, the aesthetic experience can be conceived as "sensitive selection or appreciation of formal, expressive or symbolic qualities of the product or environment, providing non-instrumental benefits that result in pleasure or satisfaction" (Fiore, 2010). As such, it allows the beholder to 'to perceive-feel-sense' an artwork, which in turn implies the activation of sensorimotor, emotional and cognitive mechanisms (Di Dio & Vittorio, 2009).

The artistic dishes must be aesthetically composed, thereat the food aesthetic represents an interaction between taste and sight that creates a certain influence on the customer's choices about food (Loporcaro et al., 2017). The process of serving food is not possible without the restaurant staff. Therefore, their aesthetic labour is also important for the guest, and can be considered as "an environment stimulus presented by the first staff" (Warhurst et al., 2000). Furthermore, another essential element in creating an aesthetic experience is the physical environment, which includes architectural design, interior design and decor that contribute to the attractiveness of the dining environment (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994).

Regardless of the current traditional perspective of aesthetics from only the visual aspect, it is necessary to include all five senses in the examination of the perception of guests. For a more detailed understanding of this topic, the following section presents an overview of the models used to measure the aesthetic restaurant experience, either as one of the dimensions of some higher constructs or as the main concept.

4.2. Measuring the Aesthetic Restaurant Experience

In order to achieve a competitive advantage, service companies strive to achieve the greatest possible restaurant experience for guests. Consequently, the need arose for the measuring of the restaurant experience. Due to the lack of literature, in the review of previous research, special emphasis was placed on aesthetic experience.

Table 1 summarizes the main findings of 26 collected scientific articles. As shown in Table 1, data of extracted articles were chronologically analysed following by author and year, country, conference/journal, method, constructs and/or dimensions.

Of the total number of studies shown in the table, twenty-three of them were categorised as original scientific articles (88.46%), and the remaining publications were presented at congresses and conferences (11.56%).

The majority of journal articles were published in the International Journal of Hospitality Management (30.43%), Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management (13.04%) and Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (8.70%). According to the type of research, most of the studies used a quantitative research approach (69.23%) followed by qualitative (19.23%) and mixed approach (11.54%).

Table 1. Aesthetic restaurant experience – previous research

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	JOURNAL / CONFERENCE	Method	CONSTRUCTS AND/OR DIMENSIONS
Ryu & Shawn Jang (2008)	USA	Journal of Foodservice Business Research	Quantitative	Six dimensions of DINERSCAPE model: (1) Facility Aesthetics, (2) Ambience, (3) Lighting, (4) Table Settings, (5) Layout, (6) Service Staff
Liu & Jang (2009a)	USA	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Restaurant attributes, (2) Consumer satisfaction, (3) Behavioural intentions Four dimensions are included within the construct restaurant attributes: (1) Food-related attribute, (2) Service-related attribute, (3) Atmospherics-related attributes, (4) Other attributes
Liu & Jang (2009b)	USA	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Five constructs: (1) Dining atmospheric, (2) Positive emotions, (3) Negative emotions, (4) Perceived value, (3) Behavioural intentions Four dimensions are included within the construct dining atmospheric: (1) Interior design, (2) Ambience, (3) Spatial layout, (4) Human elements
Wu & Liang (2009)	Taiwan	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Service encounter elements, (2) Experiential values, (3) Consumer satisfaction Three dimensions are included within the construct service encounter elements: (1) Restaurant environment factors, (2) Interaction with service employee, (3) Interaction with other consumer Three dimensions are included within the construct experiential values: (1) Fair price, (2) Time efficiency, (3) Excellent service, (4) Aesthetics, (5) Escapism
Jang & Namkung (2009)	USA	Journal of Business Research	Quantitative	Six constructs: (1) Product quality, (2) Atmospherics, (3) Service quality, (4) Emotion (positive), (5) Emotion (negative), (6) Behavioural Intentions

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	JOURNAL / CONFERENCE	Method	CONSTRUCTS AND/OR DIMENSIONS
Marković et al. (2010)	Croatia	Tourism and Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Seven factors of DINERSERV model: (1) Cleanliness and appearance of facilities and staff, (2) Assurance, (3) Individual attention, (4) Satisfaction and loyalty, (5) Basic demands, (6) Responsiveness, (7) Reliability Two factors of customers' restaurant service perception: (1) Restaurant ambience, (2) Overall dining experience
Walls et al. (2011)	USA	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	Qualitative	Two constructs: (1) Physical Environment, and (2) Human Interaction Four dimensions are included within the construct physical environment: (1) Ambience, (2) Multisensory, (3) Space/functional, (4) Sign/Symbol/Artefact
Marković et al. (2011)	Croatia	1st International Scientific Conference Tourism in South East Europe 2011.	Quantitative	Seven factors of DINERSERV model: (1) Cleanliness and appearance of facilities and staff, (2) Assurance, (3) Individual attention, (4) Satisfaction and loyalty, (5) Basic demands, (6) Responsiveness, (7) Reliability Five factors of city restaurant customers' expectations: (1) Assurance and empathy, (2) Cleanliness and reliability, (3) Appearance of facilities and staff, (4) Satisfaction and loyalty, (5) Staff quality Eight factors of city restaurant customers' perceptions: (1) Satisfaction and loyalty, (2) Appearance of staff and restaurant interior, (3) Individual attention, (4) Confidence, (5) Appearance of dining area and rest rooms, (6) Reliable service, (7) Prompt service, (8) Staff quality and attractive exteriors

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	JOURNAL / CONFERENCE	Method	CONSTRUCTS AND/OR DIMENSIONS
Ryu & Han (2011)	Korea	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Physical environment, (2) Disconfirmation, (3) Customer satisfaction, (4) Customer Loyalty Six dimensions are included within the construct physical environment: (1) Facility Aesthetics, (2) Ambience, (3) Lighting, (4) Table Settings, (5) Layout, (6) Service Staff
Wardono et al. (2012)	Japan	Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences	Qualitative	Four constructs: (1) Physical service environment, (2) Customers' perceived sociability, (3) Emotion, (4) Behavioural intention Three dimensions are included within the construct physical service environment: (1) Colours, (2) Lighting, (3) Décor
Horng et al. (2013)	Taiwan	Tourism Management	Qualitative	Four dimensions of Innovative Physical Dining Environment: (1) Eco-friendless, (2) Creativity, (3) Aesthetic, (4) Performance
Marković et al. (2013)	Croatia	Recent Advances in Business Management & Marketing	Quantitative	Seven factors of DINERSERV model: (1) Tangibles, (2) Assurance, (3) Responsiveness, (4) Reliability, (5) Empathy, (6) Price, (7) Satisfaction
Canny (2014)	Indonesia	International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Dining experience attributes, (2) Consumer satisfaction, (3) Behavioural intention Three dimensions are included within construct dining experience attributes: (1) Food quality, (2) Service quality, (3) Physical environment
Tsaur et al. (2015)	Taiwan	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Mixed	Six constructs: (1) Aesthetic labour, (2) Food quality, (3) Service quality, (4) Atmospheric, (5) Positive emotion, (6) Behavioural intention Three dimensions are included within construct aesthetic labour: (1) Aesthetic trait, (2) Aesthetic requirement, (3) Service encounter

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	JOURNAL / CONFERENCE	Method	CONSTRUCTS AND/OR DIMENSIONS
Marković et al. (2015)	Croatia	Proceedings of 24th CROMAR Congress: Marketing Theory and Practice - Building Bridges and Fostering Collaboration	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Perceived quality, (2) Positive emotions, (3) Negative emotions, (4) Behavioural intention Three dimensions are included within the construct perceived quality: (1) Food quality, (2) Service quality, (3) Atmospherics
Bekar (2017)	Turkey	The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Aesthetic value components, (2) Customer aesthetic experiences, (3) Behavioural Intentions Three dimensions are included within the construct aesthetic value components: (5) Interior visual appeal, (6) Exterior visual appeal, (7) Sensory appeal
Ouyang et al. (2017)	USA	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Food aromas, (2) Emotion, (3) Impression of food and restaurant
Her & Seo (2018)	USA	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Social identity, (2) Anticipated loneliness, (3) Anticipated negative evaluation from others, (4) Intention to eat alone in the restaurant
Hanks & Line (2018)	USA	International Journal of Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Social Servicescape, (2) Attitude to Restaurant, (3) Experience Satisfaction, (4) Cognitive Loyalty Two dimensions and six sub-dimensions are included within the construct social Servicescape: (1) Employee Servicescape (Perceived Similarity, Physical Appearance, Suitable Behaviour), (2) Customer Servicescape (Perceived Similarity, Physical Appearance, Suitable Behaviour) Three dimensions are included within the construct Cognitive Loyalty: (1) Return Intention, (2) WOM Intention, (3) EWOM Intention
Paakki et al. (2019)	Finland	International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	Mixed	Three dimensions: (1) Aesthetics in food, (2) Colours in food, (3) Green colour in the eating surroundings
Horng & Hsu (2020)	Taiwan	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	Qualitative	Four dimensions: (1) Physical environment, (2) Product and service, (3) Employee's aesthetic traits, (4) Other customer's aesthetic traits

AUTHOR (YEAR)	COUNTRY	JOURNAL / CONFERENCE	Method	CONSTRUCTS AND/OR DIMENSIONS
Wen et al. (2020)	USA	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	Mixed	Five constructs: (1) Music Enjoyment, (2) Music Congruency, (3) Perceived Authenticity. (4) Satisfaction, (5) Behavioural Intention
Oh & Kim (2020)	China	Tourism Management Perspectives	Qualitative	Ten dimensions: (1) Price, (2) Reputation, (3) Occasions, (4) Location, (5) View, (6) Desserts, (7) Drinks, (8) Food, (9) Service, (10) Ambiance
Apaolaza et al. (2020)	Chile	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Aesthetic value, (2) Escapism, (3) Service excellence, (4) Customer satisfaction, (5) Customer loyalty
Carins et al. (2020)	Australia	Food Quality and Preference	Quantitative	Three constructs: (1) Facility Aesthetics, (2) Perceived Food Variety, (3) Satisfaction
Horng & Hsu (2021)	Taiwan	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	Quantitative	Four constructs: (1) Aesthetic guest experience (dining environment) (2) Pleasantness, (3) Memorable experience, (4) Behavioural intentions Four dimensions are included within the construct aesthetic guest experience: (1) Physical environment, (2) Product and service, (3) Employee's aesthetic traits, (4) Other customer's aesthetic traits

Source: Author's research

Geographic analysis showed that most of the research was conducted in the United States (34.62%), Taiwan (19.23%) and Croatia (15.38%). All researches conducted in Croatia, which are listed in the table, were published by Professor Suzana Marković and her associates.

In most publications, the aesthetic experience was measured as one of the four components which produce a positive experience for the guests in the so-called 4E model, while only in a few studies it was measured as the main concept (Bekar, 2017; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021; Loporcaro et al., 2017; Paakki et al., 2019; Tsaur et al., 2015). However, of the aforementioned publications, only in the research by Bekar (2017) and Horng & Hsu (2020, 2021) the main focus was on measuring the overall aesthetic restaurant experience. Bekar (2017) uses three components of the restaurant aesthetic value in determining the overall aesthetic experience of restaurant guests and their behavioural intentions. These aesthetic values are: (1) Interior visual appeal, (2) Exterior visual appeal and (3) Sensory appeal.

On the other hand, Horng and Hsu (2020) use a larger number of dimensions in measuring the aesthetic restaurant experience, more precisely four of them, and these are: (1) Physical environment, (2) Product and service, (3) Employee's aesthetic traits and (4) Other customer's aesthetic traits.

The same authors in 2021 tested the conceptual model developed in 2020, but this time applying the so-called S-O-R model in measuring. The main goal of this research was to determine the relationships among aesthetic stimulation, pleasantness, behavioural intentions, and memorable experiences in the restaurant. It is important to point out that within the construct of the aesthetic restaurant experience, identical dimensions were used as in their previous study in order to test the developed model.

Besides previously mentioned models for measuring overall aesthetic experience, in literature is identified the model focused on measuring the aesthetic labour. Aesthetic labour is defined as employees exhibiting the capacities and attributes for embodying an organization (Warhurst et al., 2000). This model was developed by Tsaur et al. (2015) and in measuring they use the following dimensions: (1) Aesthetic trait, (2) Aesthetic requirement and (3) Service encounter.

Measurement of food aesthetic was the main goal in the study by Paakki et al. (2019). In the research, the authors determined three important dimensions in measuring the aesthetic food experience: (1) Aesthetics in food, (2) Colours in food and (3) Green colour in the eating surroundings.

Overall, based on the literature review the following conceptual framework for measuring the aesthetic restaurant experience of guests is proposed (see Figure 1).

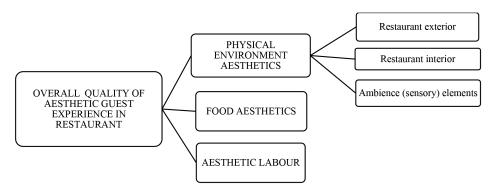


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for measuring the aesthetic restaurant experience **Source:** Author's research

It is possible to see from figure 1 that this research has identified three main dimensions, which are: (1) physical environment, (2) food aesthetics and (3) aesthetic labour.

The following sub-dimensions are included within the physical environment dimension: restaurant exterior (Bekar, 2017; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021; Marković et al., 2011), restaurant interior (Bekar, 2017; Canny, 2014; Carins et al., 2020; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021; Liu & Jang, 2009b; Ryu & Han, 2011; Ryu & Shawn Jang, 2008; Wardono et al., 2012), ambience (sensory) elements (Bekar, 2017; Canny, 2014; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009b; Marković et al., 2010, 2015; Oh & Kim, 2020; Ryu & Han, 2011; Ryu & Shawn Jang, 2008; Tsaur et al., 2015; Walls et al., 2011; Wardono et al., 2012; Wen et al., 2020).

In addition to the physical environment in this study, the **food aesthetics** dimension was identified (Canny, 2014; Horng & Hsu, 2020; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009a; Marković

et al., 2015; Oh & Kim, 2020; Ouyang et al., 2017; Paakki et al., 2019; Tsaur et al., 2015). The food aesthetics implies the visual appeal of dish, delicious and authentic food.

The last dimension - **aesthetic labour** refers to the aesthetic appearance of employees and their behaviour (Apaolaza et al., 2020; Canny, 2014; Hanks & Line, 2018; Horng et al., 2013; Horng & Hsu, 2020, 2021; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009a, 2009b; Marković et al., 2011, 2013, 2015, 2010; Oh & Kim, 2020; Ryu & Han, 2011; Ryu & Shawn Jang, 2008; Tsaur et al., 2015; Walls et al., 2011; Wardono et al., 2012; Wu & Liang, 2009).

5. CONCLUSION

Due to increasing competition in the restaurant industry, this review paper recognized the importance of examining and measuring the aesthetic restaurant experience. Although this review has provided insights into the current state of the aesthetic restaurant experience, it has certain limitations. Specifically, this literature review considered only articles published in English between 2008 and 2021. Future research should, therefore, cover a wider period, include other relevant scientific databases and use other keywords to further capture the concept of the aesthetic restaurant experience. It will be interesting to apply a bibliographic analysis to gain an even more detailed insight into previous research.

The review of the existing literature shows that the aesthetic restaurant experience is a complex concept as it involves multiple factors in its measurement. Based on the review of the selected 26 scientific articles, this study identifies the knowledge gaps and suggests future research directions. Much of the existing research on customer experience is descriptive rather than explanatory. Future research can investigate the differences in diners' and restaurateurs' perceptions of the aesthetic restaurant experience. This will provide a framework for better delivery of the overall restaurant experience. The methodological analysis of scientific articles revealed that the majority of studies used a quantitative approach. Therefore, future research can use a qualitative approach (such as sentiment analysis of online reviews) to explain the aesthetic restaurant experience in the context of social media. Another area of research is to investigate the causal relationship between different variables and the aesthetic restaurant experience using an experimental design. The conceptual framework presented in this study could be used to investigate the overall quality of aesthetic guest experience in restaurant. Indeed, the preliminary framework is not comprehensive, so further research is needed to confirm the reliability and validity of the model.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is the result of the student scientific project "MEASURING AESTHETIC GUEST EXPERIENCE IN RESTAURANT" which is supported by the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, University of Rijeka, Croatia.

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