



## Exploring the role of extrovert-introvert customers' personality prototype as a driver of customer engagement: Does relationship duration matter?

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on social exchange theory, the current study examines new drivers and their associated processes of customer engagement. In spirit, the study tests the direct and indirect impacts of the extraversion-introversion personality trait on customer engagement. The study takes into consideration the contingency role of time by testing the moderating role of relationship duration. Results demonstrate that the more extraverted customers are, the more they are likely to engage with service firms. Further, extraversion is positively related to customer-employee interaction, which in turn leads to more utilitarian and hedonic values perceived by customers. Both types of value, then, induce higher customer engagement behaviors in terms of customer referrals, knowledge sharing, and social-influence. Findings demonstrate that relationship duration moderates some of the examined relationships. The current study contributes to the literature by extending the knowledge on customer engagement's predisposition and social causes.

### 1. Introduction

With ever-increasing competition in the service industry to gain higher market share, firms should discover various ways not only to build relationships with customers, but also to drive them to engage more with their marketing efforts in favor of capturing the value of customer engagement (CE). Hence, customer purchases are not the only objective that firms should consider for success. Service firms should rely on other relational and non-transactional metrics to measure success, such as engagement. In fact, it has been said that "non-transactional customer behavior is likely to become more important" to firms (Verhoef et al., 2010, p. 248), which is, to a great degree, evidenced in today's market. Non-transactional behaviors, such as customer social-influence, referrals, and knowledge sharing, are embraced by customer CE, which allows firms to capture value from customers. In this study, we extend existing knowledge on CE in a service context, restaurants, by examining the possible impact of the customer extraversion-introversion personality trait on CE, taking into consideration the process through which this impact takes place.

We developed our study on the basis of the social exchange theory (SET) and relationship marketing literature (Blau, 1964). This theorizing is in line with Hollebeek's suggestion that CE can be viewed from the perspectives of SET and relationship marketing (Hollebeek, 2011a). SET is appropriate for explaining matters of CE, as it

underpins the exchange that takes place between customers and brands (e.g., Harrigan et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018). SET underpins customer exchanges because customers evaluate the rewards versus the costs of their relationships with a firm (Harrigan et al., 2017). In addition, SET reinforces this notion of investment and presumes that customers assess the costs and benefits of engaging or not engaging in a relationship with a firm (Harrigan et al., 2017). For instance, customers devote attention and consideration when engaging with a given restaurant to receive product offers or promotions. We argue that the cost-benefit standpoint that SET is based on (Blau, 1964) is associated with the cost-benefit perspective of customer value (Zeithaml, 1988), which is integrated into our conceptual model as a driver of CE. Further, we incorporated personality theory into our study to explain whether dispositional factors, such as the extraversion-introversion personality trait, have an effect on the social exchange process characterized by customer-employee interaction, perceived value, engagement behaviors, and relationship duration. CE is dependent upon the contingent factors that vary across contexts and interact with personal characteristics (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011a). It encompasses repeated customer-service employee interactions capable of strengthening customer involvement and investment in the firm (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Phang et al., 2013). These interactions are essential conditions for CE (Hollebeek, 2011a).

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SET offers a valuable framework for explaining the relationship developments in this study. Social exchange takes place when service providers interact and take care of customers, who in turn engender valuable outcomes that are important for business success. For that, relationship marketing and its strategies are based to a great extent on SET (Hunt et al., 2006). The extraversion–introversion continuum represents variability in a synchronized cluster of phenotypic schemes associated with social exchange (Lukaszewski and von Rueden, 2015). Social interactions, relationship building, feedback seeking, and proactive socialization are sources of support for extraverts (Crant, 1995). Moreover, the interactivity level pertaining to engagement is dependent on personal characteristics (e.g., Achterberg et al., 2003). CE entails specific investments from customers when interacting with firms, which is aligned with the SET norm of reciprocity (Hollebeek, 2011a). Furthermore, the contingent role of time has a substantial effect on social exchange, as relationship duration (RD) is a main relational factor that can alter customers' relationships with firms.

CE is the outcome of customers' motivational drivers demonstrated in the repeated actions consumers pursue toward a given firm (Prentice et al., 2019a; Van Doorn et al., 2010). CE is considered a key business outcome in the service industry (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Chathoth et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2019), mostly in restaurants (e.g., Bowden, 2009; Odoom et al., 2017). A study conducted by Gallup Incorporation showed that engaged customers, compared to disengaged ones, are 56% more likely to revisit the same restaurant.<sup>1</sup> The study also revealed that hotel guests' yearly average expenditures increase by 46% when they engage with the hotel. The key role CE plays has resulted in most of the firms trying to adopt multiple engagement metrics to evaluate their marketing outcomes. For instance, to gain competitive advantage over rivals, Chipotle, the fast-food restaurant chain that specializes in Mexican cuisine, created its own games like "Spot the Imposter" and "The Scarecrow" to create awareness about new items on the menu and push customers to participate in its reward program. Engaging customers creates substantial gains for firms, as it helps them develop their reputation (Van Doorn et al., 2010) and reduce customers' defections (Chathoth et al., 2016), a critical difficulty faced by service firms (Kim et al., 2005).

Scholars have analyzed the effect of different firm-initiated strategies to stimulate CE (e.g., Beckers et al., 2018; Fang, 2017). While prior research endeavors have focused on understanding, "What is CE about?" (e.g., Chathoth et al., 2016; Hyun and Perdue, 2017; So et al., 2014; Taheri et al., 2014) and, "What are some of the strategies that can drive CE?" (e.g., Bowden, 2009; Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Romero, 2017), a lot remains to be done in this area, and marketing scholars are often advised to explore other important research questions related to CE in the services context. For example, "Who of the customers are more likely to engage with services firms?"; "What are some of the dispositional factors that affect CS?"; and "Is there any effect of time on customers' motivation to engage with the firm?"

Customer personality traits such as extraversion–introversion may play an influential role in CE. However, empirical studies analyzing the influence of these personality traits on CE is still limited and has received scant attention (e.g., Blazevic et al., 2014; Islam et al., 2017; Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Marbach et al., 2016; Wirtz et al., 2013). With the aim to fill this void, this study explores engagement from the customers' perspective and answers a fundamental research question: "What kind of customers, extraverts or introverts, is more likely to engage with the firm, and why?" Specifically, it examines the influential role of extraversion–introversion as a key

personality trait in driving customers to engage or not engage with restaurants. Further, it explores the process through which the proposed impact of extraversion–introversion on CE takes place. Understanding the role of the extraversion trait in relation to CE is vital for better implementation of marketing and engagement strategies utilized by firms.

This study also builds on the contingency model of time and the premise that RD impacts the nature of customer–service provider relationships (e.g., Parkhe, 1993). Thus, it is suggested that RD, as a situational factor, can affect some of the relationships hypothesized. The failure to study the dynamics of time within customer–service firm relationships might result in an incomplete understanding of the service exchange taking place between customers and service employees. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no prior study has empirically tested the relationships hypothesized in one inclusive model (Fig. 1).

The article proceeds with a literature review on the extraversion–introversion personality trait and CE, followed by a development of the conceptual framework (Fig. 1). Further, the methodology section is provided, followed by empirical findings. The article continues with a discussion of the findings, including thorough theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, some of the study's limitations are summarized while new research ideas are proposed.

## 2. Literature background

### 2.1. Extraversion–introversion personality trait

Values, motivations, and preferences are reflections of one's personality traits (Harris and Lee, 2004). These traits are generally stable over time, leading to consistency in defining the proper nature of a person (Ajzen, 2005). They are influential factors because they have been shown to influence a wide range of customers' behaviors (Mottram and Fleming, 2009). One such personality trait, which is critical in the services context, is *extraversion–introversion*, which is generally defined along a "*continuum*." As an enduring personality trait, extraversion–introversion is influential and related to fundamental factors in marketing (Viswanathan et al., 2018), specifically, services contexts (Jani and Han, 2014). On that basis, extraversion may have a significant effect on customers' attitudes and behaviors toward service providers. Extraversion–introversion is a unique personality trait marketers can utilize to segment customers. Marketers base their segmentation on psychological factors, such as personal interests, motivations, and attitudes associated with such traits. They can also design different marketing communication strategies that appeal to either extraverts or introverts.

Extraversion, or "surgency," is defined as "an energetic approach to the social and material world and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality" (John and Srivastava, 1999, p. 121). Extraverts are known for being sociable, outgoing, interactive, assertive, talkative, outspoken, open, and energetic (Digman, 1990; McCrae and Costa, 1987; Mottram and Fleming, 2009). As a personality trait, extraversion has been shown as a determinant of the extent and quality of social interactions (Mooradian and Olver, 1997), since extraverts are not shy when interacting with strangers and strive for excitement and pleasure of attention from large groups of individuals whom they are unfamiliar with (Kabadayi and Price, 2014). In addition, extraverts seek engagement in social situations more than introverts (Furnham and Brewin, 1990). According to Matzler et al. (2005), "extraversion is distinguished by venturesomeness, affiliation, positive affectivity, energy, ascendancy and ambition" (p. 35). A major goal of extraverted individuals is to have a significant social impact on others (Jensen-Campbell and Graziano, 2001). Further, they are interested in self-disclosure (Bibby, 2008), conspicuous self-presentation (Seidman, 2013), and interpersonal interaction (Mooradian and Swan, 2006). Research has proven that extraverts are not only social and outgoing in face-to-face settings, but also

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/172637/why-customer-engagement-matters.aspx>.

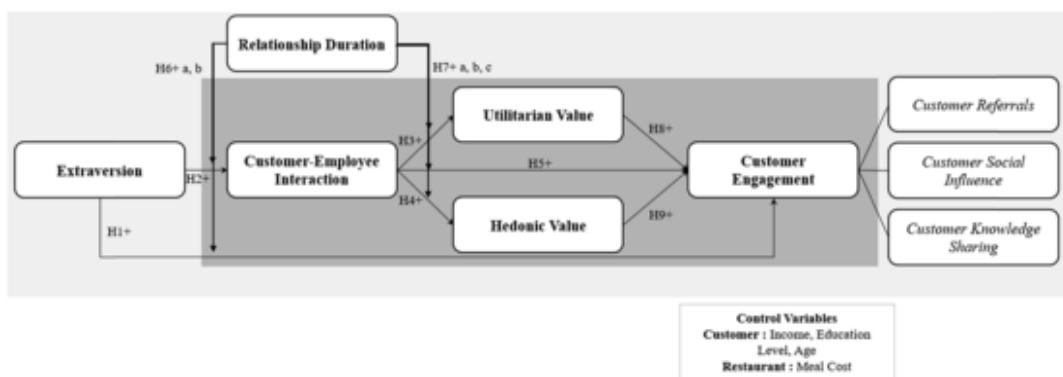


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

active players who seek interactions in online social communications (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011).

On the other side of the continuum, introversion refers to a person's tendency to be quiet, shy, inwardly focused, timid, and reserved (Hills and Argyle, 2001). As described by Amichai-Hamburger and Ben-Artzi (2000), an "introvert is a quiet, reflective person who prefers his or her own firm and does not enjoy large social events; he or she does not crave excitement and may be seen by some as distant and remote" (p. 443). Solitary activities drive pleasure to introverts, who are more likely to keep feelings to themselves, be less close to others, and less open-minded (Eysenck, 1991). Prior studies show that the variations across the extraversion-introversion continuum have been sustained despite human evolution because of propagative cost-benefit tradeoffs that take place along the continuum (e.g., Lukaszewski and Roney, 2011; Nettle, 2011).

## 2.2. Customer engagement

The CE concept has received increased attention from academic researchers recently (e.g., Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2017; Prentice et al., 2019b; Roy et al., 2018; Thakur, 2018). This concept is complex and requires multidimensional conceptualization (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Chathoth et al., 2014; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2014; So et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2012). Customers engage with service providers via relational or non-transactional behaviors that hold contribution of value to service firms (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Following the theory of engagement,<sup>2</sup> we describe the three forms of non-transactional engagement: "customer referrals," "customer social-influence," and "customer knowledge sharing."

Customer referrals or references are one of the most influential factors that marketers can benefit from. This is why firms are increasingly utilizing them to attract new customers (Van Den Bulte et al., 2018) and nurture relationships with existing ones (Jin and Huang, 2014). Customer referrals are described as current customers' acts of recommending and promoting the offerings of a firm while vouching for the value of its products and services. The level of trust associated with referral marketing is high on the customer side, making it an effective strategy for marketers to utilize. Customer referrals might take place without the intervention of the firm, but they are also applied through the encouragement and reward of incentives to customers. Incentivized referral programs are consistent with the norm of equity (Kaltcheva et al., 2014). Referral marketing helps firms attract new customers

who are not influenced by traditional marketing tools (Kumar et al., 2010). In addition to its high level of success, customer referral is cost-effective compared to other marketing and selling strategies, such as advertising. It is highly valuable in encouraging current customers to recommend the offerings of a firm to potential customers they know (Ryu and Feick, 2007) and creating stronger bonds between current customers and new ones (Kuester and Benkenstein, 2014).

Customer social-influence—such as customer-generated content, online ratings, blogs, comments, reviews, discussion, and community forums, to name few—is another form of engagement (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). It is based on social persuasion that is seen to influence current and potential customers' emotions and behaviors in many consumption contexts (Thakur, 2018). Customers are social creatures, and their increased presence in condensed social contexts as well as usage of different social sites and apps make them exert more social change and influence on others. Past literature on CE asserts that customers differ based on their social-influence behaviors through online and traditional channels, such as sharing consumption information, personal experiences, and know-how about firms' offerings (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

According to Kumar et al. (2010), engaged customers exert their social-influence on current and new customers to drive positive attitudes and behaviors toward future consumption in favor of increasing the wallet share and revenues of their favored firms. Customer social-influence moves through different channels (online and offline) and takes different forms (e.g., ratings, blogs, comments, reviews, discussions, advocacy, and community forums; (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Carlson et al., 2019; Libai et al., 2010; Thakur, 2018). In today's market, customer social-influence is a very effective social persuasion channel and can contribute to the reputation of the firm since it is generated at the customer side. This is why customers' experiences and opinions, published online and shared socially, do influence other customers' decisions.

Firms are interested in the feedback and suggestions that customers communicate to them, which they utilize to improve their current offerings, develop new services, and enhance customers' journeys and overall experiences. The feedback and suggestions customers share with firms are based on customers' personal knowledge and experiences. The information to be collected from customers, including feedback, suggestions, and complaints, can help firms better understand customers' needs, thus customizing their offerings to better satisfy customers and reduce customers' defection. According to Joshi and Sharma (2004), customers can add value to firms through their participation in knowledge development processes and by helping firms understand their individual preferences. Moreover, customers can

<sup>2</sup> While we focused on the behavioral aspect of CE, we do not claim that this aspect is the best among cognitive, affective, and behavioral CE. We only followed the aspect as it is provided by the theory of CE (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

share ideas for improvements and innovation as co-producers (Kaltcheva et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, not all firms are successful in motivating customers to share their feedback as well as managing the firm–customer feedback loop. Customers who engage in sharing their experiences and knowledge with firms are, collectively, considered as assets to these firms. This is why firms are interested in identifying these customers. Customers are considered a crucial source of information and knowledge (e.g., Fang, 2008), which can be transformed into a sustainable competitive advantage. For that, firms should be interested in identifying who among their customers engage in knowledge-sharing behaviors. Knowledge is a major asset to the firms that provides them opportunity to improve their current products and services, develop new offerings, and enhance customers' journeys and overall experiences.

In line with SET, relationship marketing literature, and CE research, we suggest that time plays a major role in customer–service firm relationships. For that reason, we have included the contingent role of time in our study by testing the possible moderating impact of RD on the effects of extraversion and customer–employee interaction.

### 2.3. The contingent role of relationship duration

RD, also referred to as relationship length (Sabiote and Román, 2009) or relationship age (Verhoef et al., 2002), is defined as the “length of time that the relationship between the exchange partners has existed” (Palmatier et al., 2006, p. 138). The contingency model of time in relationship marketing is based on the premise that mixed outcomes are the result of conditional factors, such as RD (e.g., Cooil et al., 2007; Coulter and Coulter, 2002). As such, the customer–firm relationship is time-adjusted (Cooil et al., 2007) and related to customer retention (Dagger et al., 2009). According to SET, social exchange is affected by RD, as the level of cooperation between partners changes over time and different social exchange forms take place (King and Burgess, 2008). Thus, there is value in studies that examine customer–service provider RD (Grayson and Ambler, 1999), as relationships examined with short-term RD are different in several aspects from those of longer-term durations (Lee et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2002).

The role of RD has been of interest to researchers and practitioners (Dwivedi, 2015; Sweeney and Webb, 2007), as relationship marketing strategies need to be adjusted based on the characteristics of the relationship (Kim and Lee, 2010; Lee et al., 2015). Social exchange depends on relational factors, such as the RD between parties (e.g., customers and firms), as time can describe the real stability and development of social interactions between them. Thus, the incorporation of time as a contingency variable is likely to result in a better understanding of some of the relationships examined in this study.

Multiple studies have studied RD as a moderating variable. For example, Verhoef et al. (2002) have studied the moderating impact of relationship age on effects of relational constructs, such as trust, payment equity, and commitment, on the number of services purchased and referrals. The authors found no moderating impact of relationship age on the links between the relational constructs and customer referral, but found discrepancies in the moderating role of relationship age on the links between relational constructs and the number of services purchased. In their study, Sabiote and Román (2009) tested the moderating impact of RD on the effects of service employees' social regard on customer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth, and trust. In the context of hair salons, the authors found that the positive effects employees' social regard has on customer satisfaction and trust are strengthened with time. In another study, RD was found to have no moderating impact on the effects of relational practices, relationship-specific investments, and social capital on relationship learning (Kohtamäki and Bourlakis, 2012). Furthermore, Cooil et al. (2007)

have examined the relationship length as a situational factor that can influence the positive relationship between change in customers' satisfaction and their change in wallet share in the banking industry. The authors found that the positive relationship tapers off with time. Relationship age was found to deteriorate the positive impacts of employee politeness and empathy on customer trust (Coulter and Coulter, 2002). In sum, the vital role RD plays in social exchange and customer–service provider relationships and the mixed results found in the literature on its moderating effects make time an important situational factor to include in this study.

### 3. Hypothesis development

Extraverts are intrinsically motivated by self-enhancement, enjoyment, helping others, and speaking out (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). They enjoy sharing information and feedback with others (Amiel and Sargent, 2004), as they feel comfortable expressing their emotions to and sharing their personal experiences with the public (Seidman, 2013) while gaining others' social attention (Ashton et al., 2002). In general, optimal sociability levels vary between individuals according to the levels of potential benefits versus costs of participating in social exchange with other individuals (Lukaszewski and von Rueden, 2015). Extraverts are highly sociable, as they belong to larger cooperative networks. In turn, highly sociable individuals participate in social exchange with many partners and groups (John et al., 2008; Lukaszewski and von Rueden, 2015). On the opposite end, introverts have fewer friends (Asendorpf and Wilpers, 1998), like to keep quiet, and feel better keeping their feelings to themselves (Eysenck, 1991; Hills and Argyle, 2001). Furthermore, an individual who possesses traits of both ends of the continuum is referred to as ambivert (Grant, 2013).

Extraversion is related to the person's inclination toward feeling positive emotions and expediency in developing relationships with others (Tsiaakali, 2018). Extraverts find enjoyment in sharing information while building social relations (Amiel and Sargent, 2004). They extensively use social media sites (Michikyan et al., 2014), have more friends and acquaintances via such sites (Zywica and Danowski, 2008), and join and participate in more social communities, groups, and pages (Tsai et al., 2012) while exerting high influence on friends and members in their networks/communities (Wehrli, 2008). They value interpersonal interactions (Mooradian and Swan, 2006) in a sociable and chatty atmosphere, and like, compulsively, to use social applications (Hsiao et al., 2017; Watson and Clark, 1997). In their study, Argyle and Lu (1990) found extraverts to enjoy and participate more in social activities because they associate happiness and fun with these activities. Similarly, Tsai et al. (2012) have found extraverted brand-community members to be involved in more social interactions with other members within the community. Also, they have found extraversion to increase members' levels of activity contribution within a brand community (e.g., time spent, feedback sharing, and participation in the community's events and activities). In another context, extraverted travelers were found to highly engage in travel-related, consumer-generated media as a way to express themselves while being social (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011).

Compared to introverts, extraverts are motivated to attract social attention (Anderson et al., 2012; Ashton et al., 2002). Accordingly, “Extraverts are characterized as seeking situations in which they garner social attention and interaction” (Bauer et al., 2006, p. 301). For that, they are more likely to engage in joint attention behaviors (Ashton et al., 2002). For extraverts, social exchange is an important aspect of life, as their participation in it helps them satisfy needs such as seeking social interactions, developing relationships with others, and attracting social attention (e.g., Lukaszewski and Roney, 2011; Phillips and Bedeian, 1994). According to Viswanathan et al. (2018), extraversion is an influential factor when it comes to

customers' influence on others. Extraverts perform extremely well in occupations requiring high levels of social competencies and energy (Barrick and Mount, 1991). CE may be of interest to extraverts because of their need to gain status and recognition (Barrick et al., 2002). Similarly, Marbach et al. (2016) assert that the extraversion-introversion personality trait is linked to CE. Extraverted customers would be interested in expressing themselves, finding self-enhancement through social interactions, and conveying their social-influence through their interactions with service employees and firms. Based on previous discussion, the following relationships are hypothesized:

H1Extraversion is positively related to customer engagement.

H2Extraversion is positively related to customer-employee interaction.

In the services context, "exchange" is not limited to discrete transactions but comprises social and business interactions (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014) that include communication and collaboration between customers and service employees (Solomon et al., 1985). Indeed, service production and consumption depend, to a great extent, on the interactions between customers and service employees. These interactions are the basis of the service exchange and include exchanges of social costs and benefits, such as respect, friendship, caring, and honor, that are not regulated by definite rules of contracts (King and Burgess, 2008). These social interactions influence customers' impressions of the service provider and largely determine future consumption behaviors (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2020). Moreover, inseparability and shared responsibilities are components of the nature and production of services, making social exchange between customers and service personnel a key component of the service experience (Sierra and McQuitty, 2005). Concurrently, the interactions between customers and service employees facilitate the economical exchange by means of co-operation and support that can maximize the benefits delivered to customers (King and Burgess, 2008).

Customer-employee interactions in most services contexts are influential in cultivating better service delivery and customer experiences, as suggested by the 7Ps marketing mix of the service marketing framework (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Customers interact with service employees at many touchpoints, which makes customer-employee interaction a key factor that influences customers' perception of the service (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). These interactions take a central role in value creation for both service providers and customers. Hence, service providers can benefit from personal encounters with customers by creating more value (Blocker et al., 2012), as customer-employee interaction is essential in service evaluations (Parasuraman, 1987).

In addition to the functional part, customer value is partially experiential and interactional according to the Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Thus, customer-employee interactivity plays a critical role in service exchange, as customer value is dependent on such interactions. This is why customers are highly related to the service provider during a service interaction (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). For example, recurrent customer-employee interactions can help build trust and reduce risk at a faster rate (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). These interactions have social and cognitive components that can also affect the creation of utilitarian value (UV) and hedonic value (HV).

As customer-employee interactions are dyadic in nature, it is noteworthy that these interactions may play an influential role in relation to value creation and CE. In services settings, such as restaurants, UV is linked to reasonable pricing, prompt and reliable service, and customized service, while HV is linked to mood, playfulness, fun, kindness of employees, entertainment, and social interactions (e.g., Hwang and Ok, 2013). These statuses are related to customers' perceived value and based on the cognitive and emotional states of customers (Grönroos, 1997).

Based on the SET (Blau, 1964; Kelley and Thibaut, 1978), it is suggested that customers' interactions with service employees play a major role in customer exchange with service providers. Social exchange entails indefinite responsibilities, where customers who have better service experiences are motivated to reciprocate the benefits received and look for additional future return (Hollebeek, 2011a). Frequent customer interactions with service employees and the collaboration from the customers' side contribute to the overall benefits and experience while minimizing costs, risks, and undesired consequences perceived by customers. Pansari and Kumar (2017) claim that service experience, which is based on customer interactions, transactions, and communications with others including service employees, do impact the affective and cognitive states of customers, leading to CE. Direct interactions support information exchange and rapport building between the customers and the service employees, and help in customizing the offerings to satisfy customers' specific needs. As a result, customer-employee interactions contribute to the overall service experience (Liu and Jang, 2009) and add to the service UV and HV (Hwang and Ok, 2013). Thus, two relationships are hypothesized:

H3Customer-employee interaction is positively related to utilitarian value.

H4Customer-employee interaction is positively related to hedonic value.

In addition to the possible impact of customer-employee interaction on the value perceived by customers, these interactions can directly lead to higher CE. According to Emerson (1976), social exchange includes series of interactions that engender commitments between exchange parties. In line with SET, customers and service providers can nurture their relationships through reciprocal social exchanges. More specifically, service employees interact with customers by exchanging different types of resources, such as information and services, hoping to provide benefits to customers and start a process of social exchange resulting in positive economic outcomes for both customers and the firm (Delpechitre et al., 2018). This continuous co-creation process increases CE with the firm.

CE builds on relationship marketing and the theory of interactive experiences (Brodie et al., 2011). This is why it is affected by the collaborative relationship between customers and the firm and encompasses perceived instrumental and experiential value acquired based on customer-firm interactions (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). According to Hollebeek (2011, p. 557), "customer brand-related reciprocity may result from a series of accumulated perceived brand benefits, rather than being confined to a single (e.g., the most recent) brand interaction necessarily."

According to SET, customers and services providers generate a series of interactions between them, leading to mutual obligations on the basis of reciprocal interdependence. In line with this theorizing, service quality (Islam et al., 2019), brand experience (Prentice et al., 2019b), and service fairness and convenience (Roy et al., 2018) were found to affect different dimensions of CE. Moreover, customers' interactions with service employees allow better communication and exchange of information about the services offered, and drive customers to engage in behaviors such as customer referral, knowledge sharing, and brand advocacy (e.g., Hwang and Ok, 2013). Consequently, customer-service employee interactions, based on a dual exchange, may drive customers to further participate in behaviors such as customer referrals, knowledge sharing, and social-influence. Hence, the following relationship is hypothesized:

H5Customer-employee interaction is positively related to customer engagement.

SET provides an overall guide describing how relationships (e.g., between customers and service providers/personnel) evolve over time (Wang et al., 2015). With time, customers' impressions of the relationships with service providers change, with increasing levels of confidence in the feelings of attachment toward the service providers and their employees (Verhoef et al., 2002). The relationships mature as individuals interact, learn about each other, and build mutual trust (Levin et al., 2006). SET suggests that time allows relationships to evolve into a trusting and mutual commitment between exchange parties under certain rules of exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This is in agreement with social psychology literature that suggests RD increases the confidence evaluation between partners (Swann and Gill, 1997). Long-term relationships are known for their embeddedness, as they require norms and routine from both parties, which, in turn, serve as a governance mechanism capable of socially controlling opportunistic behaviors within the relationship (Squire et al., 2009).

Relationships are more stable over time, with unsatisfactory relationships expected to end while ongoing ones go under adjustment to achieve a higher relational fit between relationship partners (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). This is in line with the "filter" theory of friendship by Duck (1977), who suggests that relationships mature with time as more personal information about each other become available, with the individuals looking for deeper aspects of one another. According to Ford (1980), the nature of the relationship changes with time as customers and the firm accumulate experiences with each other, leading the relationship to mature with reduced relational distance and uncertainty. RD increases the strength of the customer-service provider relationship (Dagger et al., 2009). The same study found that longer duration relationships are stronger than those with greater contact frequency within the relationship with the same number of total contacts. Customers become more comfortable about interacting with service providers as they become familiar with the procedures (Wang and Wu, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that with time, extraverted customers increase their interactions with service providers. This is in line with Wang and Wu (2012) suggestion that "customer evaluation of service provider interactions becomes more significant in longer-term relationships" (p. 62). In their study, Gounaris and Venetis (2002) highlighted the critical moderating influence of RD on the impacts of service quality and relationship bonding on customer trust development. In another study, Sweeney and Webb (2007) found social and psychological benefits to be of less importance in novel relationships than in mature ones. In another study, RD is found to strengthen positive relationships between social and structural relational bonds and partners' perceptions of utilitarian benefits (Lee et al., 2015). Based on the preceding evidence, the following moderating effects of RD are hypothesized:

H6 Relationship duration will strengthen the relationship between extraversion and (a) customer engagement, (b) customer-employee interaction.

H7 Relationship duration will strengthen the relationship between customer-employee interaction and (a) utilitarian value, (b) hedonic value, (c) customer engagement.

Customers' perceived value—utilitarian and hedonic—is a major determinant of customers' decision-making. This suggests that many of the customers' behaviors are outcomes of the value they perceive in their consumption (Zeithaml, 1988). Accordingly, Pansari and Kumar (2017) assert that "a customer would be engaged with the firm if he/she gets a lower price and derives maximum benefit" (p. 298). The SET is based on the cost-benefit perspective (Blau, 1964); similarly, customer value is associated with the cost-benefit perspective as well (Zeithaml, 1988). The same perspective also resembles the interactive nature of CE (Hollebeek, 2011a). Thus, customer value and CE

constructs are highly related to each other. In her study, Bowden (2009) examined the CE process in restaurants. In the in-depth interviews she conducted with customers, she found anecdotal evidence of the possible influence of customers' perceived value on CE. She shows that repeat customers consider the service experience, relational benefits, and other social and affective aspects of the service provided. Moreover, Wirtz et al. (2013) suggest that functional and social benefits experienced by customers may positively impact CE. The value created from the consumption experience as perceived by customers (Keng and Ting, 2009) is found to strengthen the customer-firm relationship (e.g., Jin et al., 2013). Moreover, HV is found to be a better predictor of CE intentions compared to satisfaction with reward (Högberg et al., 2019).

UV and HV affect customers' behavioral intentions and outcomes toward the firm (Hyun et al., 2011). The rationale suggests that customers will not refer their friends or relatives and will not talk positively about their experience to others if the service they consume is of low economical and experiential value. On the opposite end, customers are more likely to increase their engagement in favor of giving back things of value, such as customer referrals and knowledge sharing, as a form of reciprocity for the value they experience. A customer, "having received something of value, develops a sense of obligation to reciprocate" (Masterson, 2001, p. 596). Reciprocity is a major characteristic of social exchange, suggesting that customers will engage in behaviors of value to the firm as a way of giving back. Indeed, customers reciprocate the benefits they experience when interacting with brands (Hollebeek, 2011a). From that, the following relationships are hypothesized:

H8 Customer utilitarian value is positively related to customer engagement.

H9 Customer hedonic value is positively related to customer engagement.

#### 4. Methodology

The restaurant sector was selected as a suitable context to conduct this study for multiple reasons. First, the restaurant sector in the United States is one of the biggest, with approximately \$800 billion in projected sales last year while employing 10% of the overall workforce, according to the National Restaurant Association.<sup>3</sup> Second, the tenacious competition for survival in such a fast-growing sector (Han et al., 2016) is pushing managers to look for novel tactics (i.e., CE) to survive and gain a competitive advantage (e.g., Romero, 2017). Third, the restaurant sector has been identified as a relevant context for studies related to CE, customer value (e.g., Bowden, 2009; Odoom et al., 2017; Ryu et al., 2010), and customer-service employees interactions (e.g., Nicholls, 2010; Rihova et al., 2013).

The hypothesized model is tested with a sample of 397 restaurant diners from the U.S. collected through the convenience sampling method. The data collection was administered using a Web-based survey shared through an online research panel. The developed survey was checked by two marketing academics and two restaurant personnel. Based on the feedback, minor changes were included to improve the survey's wording and clarity. Then, a pretest of the survey took place with 22 participants to ensure the survey was readable and clear. Respondents who participated in the pretest were not part of the sample utilized for the analysis. After accepting the invitation to participate in the study, respondents were asked to choose and think about a restaurant they had visited during the past six months. Respondents who said that they hadn't visited a restaurant during this period were not allowed to participate. This method allows extra deviation

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.restaurant.org/News-Research/Research/soi>.

between answers (e.g., Line et al., 2018). Detailed characteristics of the final sample are included in Appendix A.

The survey contained multi-item measures developed by prior studies. A seven-point Likert agreement scale was used. A second-order CE measure with three non-transactional engagement dimensions—"customer referrals, social-influence, and sharing knowledge"—was adapted from (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). The extraversion-introversion measure was adopted from Rammstedt and John (2007). Respondents with higher scores on this measure are more (less) extraverted (introverted), since this personality trait is viewed as a single continuum (Watson and Clark, 1997). A customer-employee interaction measure was utilized based on previous studies (Dabholkar et al., 1996; O'-Cass and Ngo, 2012).

The measure of UV was adapted from Palmatier et al. (2007). The HV was measured using a five-item measure (Babin et al., 1994). It is well known in the hospitality management literature that customers visiting restaurants will likely perceive UV through the satisfaction of hunger, enjoyment of economical food, or experience of a tasty craving. They can also perceive HV through social interactions, fun, and experiential and recreational visiting (Hwang and Ok, 2013; Ryu and Han, 2011). As a common practice in previous studies (Coulter and Coulter, 2002; Wang and Wu, 2012), RD was measured using one question: "How many years have you been a customer of the restaurant?" This operationalization of RD is behavioral in nature (Dagger et al., 2009). The survey included another section to collect additional information (e.g., demographics) from the respondents. Based on previous studies, the effects of respondents' ages, incomes, and educations on all endogenous variables were accounted for (e.g., Dagger et al., 2009; Itani et al., 2019; Patterson, 2007). Moreover, the restaurants' average meal cost was added as a covariate that represents a proxy of the restaurant type.

## 5. Findings

To test the model, partial least squares structural equation modeling was utilized using SmartPLS (3.0). The results show adequate reliability of the measures with the lowest composite reliability equals to 0.82 (Hair et al., 2006). Regarding convergent reliability all the items' loadings were higher than 0.65 level. Further, all the items have loaded significantly at  $p < .01$  on their assigned latent factors. None of the items loaded higher on other factors (cross loading). Regarding the discriminant validity, the square root AVE for each of the latent constructs in the model is greater than the correlations the focal latent construct has with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). To further check the discriminant validity, the "heterotrait-monotrait ratio"

test (HTMT) was conducted (Henseler et al., 2015). None of the HTMT between the different pairs of all the latent factors in the model was higher than the cutoff level of 0.85, showing further indication of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Kline, 2015). Overall, the outer model analysis delivers evidence of reliability, internal consistency, and validity of the employed measures. The correlations, descriptive statistics, reliability, AVE, and square root AVE of the latent factors are summarized in Table 1. The measures used with their items and loadings can be found in Appendix B.

The inner model tested provides the path coefficients of the relationships hypothesized with their significance level using nonparametric bootstrapping test. For simplification, the results are summarized in Table 2. The results support most of the direct relationships hypothesized.

In H1, it is hypothesized that a positive relationship between extraversion and engagement. Findings provide support to H1 ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, the more extravert (introvert) customer is, the more (less) he/she is likely to engage with the restaurant. The results also show a positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between extraversion-introversion and customer-employee interaction. The more extravert (introvert) customers are the, more (less) they are likely to interact with service employees. Further, H3 and H4 propose positive impacts of customer-employee interaction on UV and HV, respectively. The results demonstrate a positive effect ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of customer-employee interactions on UV. A similar effect of customer-employee interaction on HV is found ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The results suggest that customer-service employee interactions support the different dimensions of value creation process. For restaurants, customer-employee interaction is an advantage they need to build on since it maximizes the HV and UV perceived by customers. Further, a positive relationship between customer-employee interaction and CE is demonstrated ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in support of H5. Regarding the moderating effects of RD, no support was found to H6a. The results provide support to the interaction effect (H6b) between RD and extraversion on customer-employee interaction ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For that, extravert customers are found to increase their interactions with service employees as customers-restaurants relationships matures. Further, the results demonstrate positive interaction effect of RD and customer-employee interaction on HV ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in support of H7b. Time has the potential to drive more hedonic and enjoyment outcomes of the customer-service employees interactions. The result didn't provide support in favor of H7a and H7c. The significant interaction effects are presented in Figures (2 & 3) using the procedures suggested by Aiken et al., 1991. In H8 and H9, UV and HV are hypothesized to have positive

**Table 1**  
Correlation matrix, descriptive statistics, and average variance extracted.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Extraversion	.83									
2 Customer-Employee Interaction	.25**	.84								
3 Utilitarian Value	.04	.22**	.84							
4 Hedonic Value	-.02	.19**	.57**	.80						
5 Customer Engagement	.23**	.64**	.44**	.36**	.88					
6 Relationship Length	-.03	.01	.03	.06	-.01	—				
7 Age	.08	.05	.07	.12*	-.21**	.18**	—			
8 Education Level	.03	-.08	-.09	-.12*	-.04	-.17**	-.07	—		
9 Income	.15**	.11*	-.04	-.01	.04	-.03	-.05	.33**	—	
10 Restaurant Meal Cost	.18**	.23**	-.06	-.07	.14**	.01	-.04	.11*	.20**	—
Mean	3.81	4.24	5.88	5.79	4.82	9.16	37.98	—	64277	18.38
Standard Deviation	1.50	1.38	.87	.94	.98	6.97	12.24	—	41093	12.17
Composite Reliability	.82	.83	.92	.90	.91	—	—	—	—	—
Average Variance Extracted	.69	.70	.71	.64	.77	—	—	—	—	—

Significance level \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Squared roots of average variance extracted are shown on the diagonal on the diagonal. Income & meal cost in \$. (—) not applicable.

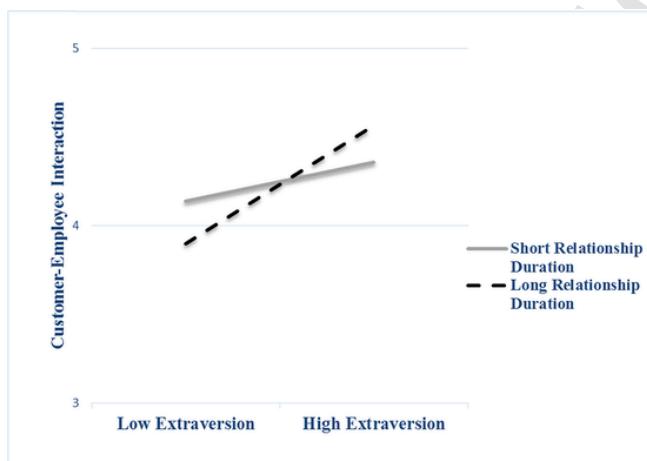
**Table 2**  
Result.

Hypothesized Relationships		Coefficient	Supported p < .05
H1	Extraversion → Customer Engagement	.14**	✓
H2	Extraversion → Customer-employee Interaction	.22**	✓
H3	Customer-Employee Interaction → Utilitarian Value	.25**	✓
H4	Customer-Employee Interaction → Hedonic Value	.24**	✓
H5	Customer-Employee Interaction → Customer Engagement	.57**	✓
H6a	Relationship Duration * Extraversion → Customer Engagement	-.06	✗
H6b	Relationship Duration * Extraversion → Customer-Employee Interaction	.12*	✓
H7a	Relationship Duration * Customer-Employee Interaction → Utilitarian Value	.07	✗
H7b	Relationship Duration * Customer-Employee Interaction → Hedonic Value	.11*	✓
H7c	Relationship Duration * Customer-Employee Interaction → Customer Engagement	.03	✗
H8	Utilitarian Value → Customer Engagement	.14*	✓
H9	Hedonic Value → Customer Engagement	.16**	✓

Controlled Paths	Utilitarian Value	Hedonic Value	Customer-Employee Interaction	Customer Engagement
Restaurant Average Meal Cost	-.10*	-.09	.17**	.01
Income	-.04	.01	.10*	-.06
Education Level	-.05	-.08	-.13*	.04
Age	.05	.08	.04	-.30**

Significance level \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

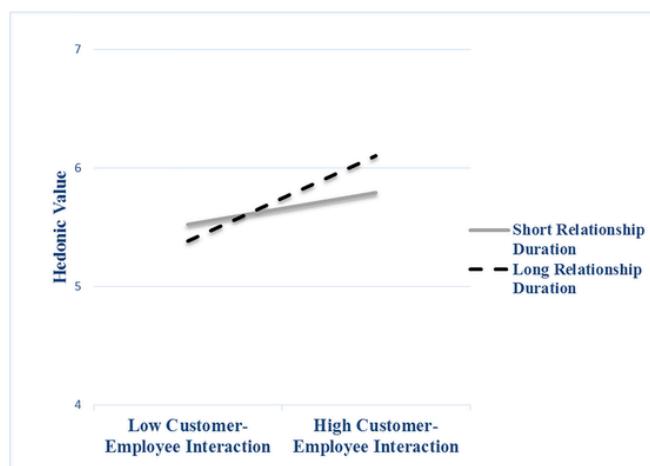


**Fig. 2.** Moderating effect of relationship duration on the relationship between extraversion and customer-employee interaction.

impacts on CE. The results support both relationships with CE being positively influenced by UV ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and HV ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Overall, the model tested explains 58% of variance in CE.

## 6. Discussion

In the current study, a model of the possible relationship between extraversion-introversion as a dispositional personality trait and CE is tested. This study fills a research gap in the literature by finding answers to an overlooked question: "What type of customers, based



**Fig. 3.** Moderating effect of relationship duration on the relationship between customer-employee interaction and hedonic value.

on their extraversion-introversion personality trait, is more likely to engage with restaurants?" This is important, as CE behaviors lead to positive business consequences for firms' performance (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). Moreover, CE behaviors have huge impacts on firms' marketing efforts to create effective social presences, find new customers, and keep developing innovative offerings.

Our investigation of CE is grounded in SET, which provides a strong reason to expect that CE is the outcome of the social exchange and personal interactions between customers and service employees as well as the benefits (i.e., UV and HV) of these interactions experienced by customers. We show that the social exchange model is affected by the customer dispositional trait, specifically extraversion-introversion, as well as the length of the relationship between the customer and the restaurant. Our study delivers an insightful prospective toward a dispositional determinant of CE, specifically emphasizing customers' self-governing contribution of the extraversion-introversion personality trait in the prediction of CE. This provides support to dispositional affective-, motivational-, and social-based drivers of CE.

The study tests the direct effect of extraversion on CE and finds it to be positive. It also demonstrates an indirect effect of extraversion-introversion on CE through customer-employee interaction and two forms of value creation. This study provides a starting point for the customer personality trait-engagement process. The study's findings demonstrate that the more extraverted (introverted) customers are, the more (less) likely they are to engage with restaurants by means of customer knowledge sharing, referrals, and social-influence behaviors. This is because extraverted customers appreciate interpersonal interactions and are keen to share information, experiences, and feedback. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the more extraverted (introverted) customers are, the more (less) likely they are to socially interact with service employees. These social interactions play a major, key role in motivating consumers to engage with service firms while creating value for a better overall service experience.

The customer journey is influenced by the interactions customers have with service employees. Findings demonstrate that customer-employee interaction has the ability to enhance customer UV and HV, which, in turn, drives CE. These findings provide empirical evidence in support of prior claims that the affective and cognitive states of customers can impact CE (e.g., Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Based on the current study, we claim that customer-employee interaction is an important touchpoint in the customer journey and provides the opportunity for service providers to maximize customers' perceived value, leading to more engagement. Customers expect service personnel

to create the maximum value possible so they as customers can perform actions of value to the service firm.

This study contributes to current knowledge on CE in several ways. First, it empirically validates if extraversion–introversion, as a personality trait of customers, plays a role in driving customers to engage with restaurants. This offers opportunities for future research exploration combining personal psychology and CE. Second, the study also examines the indirect effect through extraverted customers' engagement with a given restaurant. In particular, this study contributes to the progression of CE phenomena by capturing the vital role of customer–employee interaction within these phenomena. Taken together, the study highlights the importance of customers' personalities, social exchange, human interactions, and relationship marketing in encouraging CE outcomes. Third, according to the findings, UV and HV have significant effects on CE. These findings highlight the importance of value-driven marketing in CE. Finally, it is important for service firms to retain customers as long as possible, since time allows for better development of customer–employee relationships and leads to an increase in social interactions and better hedonic experiences. Time can facilitate the social exchange between customers and service personnel, leading to better service exchanges.

## 7. Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, our study has several valuable implications. While services firms, specifically restaurants, cultivate countless efforts and investments to boost CE, we argue that restaurants can capture value from customers by means of engagement. Engaged customers do create content related to a given restaurant, refer other people they know to the restaurant, and share information and feedback about their experiences with the restaurant. By doing so, customers will be helping the marketers of the restaurants to increase awareness of them, enhance their images, and grow sales. Engaged customers create a unique communication channel and deliver messages with higher impact and reach compared to the same messages communicated by marketers.

As the results demonstrate, the more extraverted (introverted) customers are, the more (less) likely they are to engage with restaurants. Thus, segmenting customers based on their personality traits—extravert versus introvert—allows firms to achieve higher effectiveness and efficiency with their CE management. Marketers need to take into consideration that extraverted customers are more receptive to firms' CE management efforts. For example, marketers must invest more in social media to drive CE of extraverts, who are known to use social media extensively (Correa et al., 2010).

Restaurants can increase CE by first targeting extraverted customers. Marketing strategies are easier with the accessibility of behavioral, interest, and psychological segmentation and targeting provided by the data collected from most connected tools, such as mobile apps, search engines, and social media platforms (e.g., Matz et al., 2017). Specifically, data collected from search queries, reviews, social media reactions, purchasing patterns, and online browsing history, to name few, allow accurate targeting of customers based on their personality traits, regulatory focuses, and psychological states, leading to enhanced outcomes, such as brand preference, customer retention, purchases, and customer lifetime value (Matz and Netzer, 2017). Extraverts are known to better respond to personality-matched marketing and advertising (e.g., Hirsh et al., 2012; Moss, 2017) at the time they feel their innate extravert nature is being reinforced and highlighted (Matz and Netzer, 2017).

Extraverts are more likely to work in socially condensed job domains, such as public relations, teaching, financial advising, and health care, to name few. Thus, in addition to hobbies and interests, marketers can use professions to identify whether customers tend to be extraverts or introverts. Further, face-to-face interactions allow for an easier

way of detecting where customers stand on the extraversion–introversion continuum. Extraverted customers are known to be talkative, energetic, active, less polite, sociable, and assertive. These characteristics and behaviors can be observed and detected by service employees. Thus, discovering a customer's personality as an extravert or introvert during service exchange is possible. To do so, service employees can focus on certain points and scripts, such as customer sociability, interpersonal interactions of customers, and visit/eating conditions (e.g., group or individual), to name few.

On the other hand, service employees have to think about customers as introverts when they are less sociable, more polite, and timid. It is imperative for service employees to adapt their service exchange and behaviors in a way that best fits the personality of the customer. This study shows that to manage the effect of the extraversion–introversion disposition for their own benefits, service firms need to make sure to nurture their relationships with customers, keeping in mind the advantages of time in facilitating social interactions and creating better service experiences.

Alternatively, service employees dealing with introverted customers need to focus on a few points that can drive better results, such as abstaining from aggressive friendliness, building trust, retaining customers, nurturing customer relationships, and assuring privacy. Based on the findings, we suggest that nurturing the relationships with introverted customers may buffer the negative effect of introversion on customer–employee interaction, leading to CE. We argue that longer relationships with customers resemble strong customer–service provider relationship quality. This is evident in the amplified increase in HV caused by customer–employee interaction with longer relationships. We suggest that customer–employee interactions become more appealing to customers with time, as both parties will be learning about each other—specifically, service employees learning about customers who in turn are building trust and getting used to interacting with the employees. Time will allow service employees to understand how to better serve customers and improve their enjoyment and experiences with the restaurant. Similarly, customers will become used to interacting with the service employees and become more assertive in asking for service that can maximize his or her HV. CE strategies have to be modified based on customer–restaurant RD.

Training and development should focus on enhancing certain soft skills and the intellect of service employees who are in direct contact with customers; relevant topics include interpersonal intelligence, social awareness, relationship management, linguistics intelligence, and communication. Service employees must be trained to recognize possible opportunities that can drive customers to interact more with them. Moreover, service employees should be able to understand how to differentiate between customers who they interact with on the basis of their personality, extravert–introvert. Training programs need to incorporate developing employees' service manner and identification behaviors that are proven to elicit a sense of comfort for customers in the service interactions (Lloyd and Luk, 2011). Customers expect service employees to be welcoming, empathetic, attentive listeners, sociable, and genuine. Moreover, customers who are found to engage with a given restaurant have to be acknowledged for their engagement behaviors. For example, managers and service employees need to appreciate, thank, and incentivize customers' feedback in recognizing an outstanding service experience, identifying a failure, and suggesting ideas for service development or any other engagement behaviors they perform. Moreover, top customers engaging with the restaurant's social media activities by sharing and liking and referring others to try the restaurant offerings should be rewarded.

Findings inform managers about the personal and social factors that generate higher levels of engagement. By understanding the role of extraversion–introversion, service interactions, and perceived value in CE, managers are in a better position to design strategies that enhance

customers' interest in indulging in CE. Moreover, since this study shows that customer-employee interaction drives value and CE, service providers need to implement strategies to increase customers' touchpoints and encourage more direct encounters to take place between customers and service employees. For example, the servicescapes of restaurants should be taken into consideration in a way that facilitates social interactions. Services employees are considered a major social factor in the service environment since they can increase the favorability, attractiveness, and pleasantness of a restaurant (Jang et al., 2015). Lin and Mattila (2010) found customer interactions with service employees to increase customer pleasure and satisfaction. As such, design of the servicescape should be planned in a way that allows more social interactions with customers (e.g., seating, waiting place, hosts welcoming, accessibility of employees, and payment counters). Moreover, the psychological environment should be designed to maximize the HV for customers. For example, the restaurant servicescape, including music, lighting, temperature, exteriors, interiors, and colors, is found to increase customer pleasure at the restaurant (Kim and Moon, 2009; Lin and Mattila, 2010). Moreover, a restaurant's ambient conditions, artifacts, and signs can increase customer pleasure and arousal (Ellen and Zhang, 2014).

Restaurants can enhance UV by offering value-based size meals, providing promotions, and increasing menu diversity while customizing their offerings based on customers' tastes. Restaurants can surprise customers by adding free items (e.g., desserts and appetizers) to customers' orders and hand out promotional items for customers holding rewards cards, which can help nurture customer relationships. At the same time, managers and service employees are advised to add social touchpoints to increase CE by creating unique, memorable, and fun experiences to exceed the hedonic expectations of customers. HV will become the key differentiator that can create a competitive advantage for restaurants. Restaurants' managements need to think about customer experience as processes that include dynamic and social interactions in which customers act as co-producers (Walter et al., 2010). Service employees need to keep a smile and make sure to greet customers with courtesy and respect. Further, they should be friendly, patient, listen well, and go the extra mile for better and memorable service interactions with customers. With this in place, service employees will be able to learn more about the preferences of customers in order to serve them better the next time. Moreover, service employees need to show customers that they look forward to seeing them next time. Respect and courtesy (e.g., introducing themselves, using respectful titles, calling customers by their names to show that they have been remembered every time they return) will help service employees develop personal relationships with customers.

## 8. Study limitations and future research

While this study extends the literature on CE, the results should be interpreted with caution due to some limitations, which render new ideas for future research. One of the limitations arises from the data collected. The sample utilized is context specific, as it was restricted to the restaurant sector in the United States. Thus, the relationships found should be tested in other contexts (e.g., hotels, spas, gyms, and retail) in order to endorse their external validity. Limiting the study to the restaurant context could be the reason behind some of the non-significant moderating effects of RD. Another limitation is the focus on one personality trait. To further understand the customer personality-engagement relationship, further personality traits (e.g., Big five personality traits or Eysenck personality questionnaire) might be examined as antecedents of CE and customer-employee interaction (e.g., Eysenck, 1991; Rammstedt and John, 2007). For example, CE would be positively associated with openness to experience. Another limitation is the operationalization of CE. The theory of engagement (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017) focuses is on the

behavioral aspect of CE. While other conceptualizations (e.g., Hollebeek, 2011b) have addressed CE from multiple aspects (e.g., cognitive, affective, and behavioral), we do not claim that behavioral operationalization is better. We have only followed this direction based on the suggestions by Pansari and Kumar (2017) in the theory of engagement the developed. Future studies can retest some of the relationships using cognitive and affective aspects of CE.

Participants were given the option to name any of the restaurants they visited recently without reference to any specific type or cuisine. While this procedure enhances the generalizability of the results across different types of restaurants, future studies need to retest the relationships in specific restaurant settings. For example, the relationship between UV (HV) and CE could be stronger (weaker) in the context of convenience/fast-food or family/popular restaurants compared to fine dining/gourmet restaurants. Moreover, opportunities for customers to interact with service employees might be limited within convenience/fast-food or family/popular restaurants compared to fine dining/gourmet. Following similar logic, the occasions (e.g., social, business, and celebration) for repeated visits to the restaurants should be addressed as a situational factor that can alter the relationships found.

## Appendix A. Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Percent-age (%)
Gender	Female	54.9
	Male	45.1
Education Level	High school graduate	10.1
	Some college but no degree	19.6
	Associate degree in college	12.6
	Bachelor's degree in college	42.1
	Master's degree	13.6
	Doctoral & Professional degree	2
Martial Status	Married	52.9
	Divorced	10.1
	Never	35
	Married	2
	Other	2
Average Age (years)		37.98
Average Income (Yearly)	\$	64,227

## Appendix B.

Scale	Load-ing
<b>Extraversion</b>	
I see myself as someone who is reserved (r).	.70
I see myself as someone who is outgoing, sociable.	.93
<b>Customer-Employee Interaction</b>	
I try to interact with the restaurant's employees if possible.	.83
I work with the restaurant's employees to have the best dining experience.	.84
<b>Hedonic Value</b>	
I have good time when I eat at this restaurant.	.83
I continue to eat at this restaurant, not because I had no other choice, but because I wanted to.	.70
I enjoy the food offered by this restaurant.	.77
While eating at this restaurant, I am able to enjoy my time and forget my problems.	.86
I enjoy eating at this restaurant, not just for the food it has.	.83
<b>Utilitarian Value</b>	
I feel that I am getting a good deal in eating at this restaurant.	.81
I might continue to eat at this restaurant, even if prices were increased a little bit.	.85
The services/products provided by this restaurant are worth the cost.	.87
This restaurant provides valuable food options to customers.	.84
I do get my money's worth when I eat at this restaurant.	.82
<b>Customer Engagement</b>	
<b>Customer Referrals</b>	
I promote the restaurant because of the benefits it provided by it.	.74
I enjoy referring this restaurant to my friends and relatives whether there are referral incentives or not.	.67
In addition to the value derived from the restaurant's products/services, the other referral incentives also encourage me to refer this restaurant to my friends and relatives.	.77
Given that I eat at this restaurant, I refer my friends and relatives to this brand because of some referral incentives.	.74
<b>Customer Social-Influence</b>	
I love talking about my experience with this restaurant.	.93
I discuss the benefits that I get from this restaurant with others.	.90
I am a part of this restaurant and mention it in my conversations.	.80
I actively discuss this restaurant on different media platforms.	.87
<b>Customer Knowledge Sharing</b>	
I provide feedback about my experiences with the restaurant.	.82
I provide suggestions for improving the performance of the restaurant's products/services.	.84
I provide suggestions/feedbacks about the new product/services by the restaurant.	.93
I provide feedback/suggestions for developing new products/services for this restaurant.	.91

(r) = reverse coded item.

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