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To cite this article: Jiseon Ahn, Ki-Joon Back & Petra Barišić (2019): The effect of dynamic integrated resort experience on Croatian customer behavior, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, DOI: [10.1080/10548408.2018.1557097](https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2018.1557097)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2018.1557097>



Published online: 14 Jan 2019.



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ARTICLE



## The effect of dynamic integrated resort experience on Croatian customer behavior

Jiseon Ahn<sup>a</sup>, Ki-Joon Back<sup>b</sup> and Petra Barišić<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Hospitality, Tourism, and Events, Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Subang Jaya, Malaysia; <sup>b</sup>Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston, Houston, TX, USA; <sup>c</sup>Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to gain knowledge on customers' experience toward integrated resorts in Croatia. Customer perception toward integrated resorts was collected via face-to-face survey. The multi-dimensional experiential values and behaviors of 354 customers were studied. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Croatian customers are engaged with the integrated resort experience. This engagement influences their satisfaction and behavioral intention. Specifically, customers with high playfulness and service expectations tend to engage positive behavioral intention toward the integrated resort brand. This paper offers the first insight into the relationship between experiential value and behavioral intention in the integrated resort setting.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 July 2018  
Revised 12 October 2018  
Accepted 1 December 2018

### KEYWORDS

Experiential value; atmosphere; playfulness; return on investment; service excellence; brand engagement; brand satisfaction; behavioral intention; integrated resort; Croatian customers

### Introduction

The integrated resort industry has exhibited global growth in the past years (Ahn & Back, 2018a). The demand for integrated resorts is not only confined in US, but is also evident in Europe and Asia (Ahn & Back, 2018a). As an emerging country, Croatia has experienced an increasing demand for integrated resorts. Zagreb, a major city in Croatia, has a high percentage of growing tourism revenue, which comprise up 19.6% of the country's GDP (Croatian National Bank, 2018). The rising popularity of integrated resorts in Croatia has increased competition among integrated resort service providers. With intense competition, understanding customer behaviors is important to achieve sustainable growth. Croatian customers expect to have memorable and unique experiences for their vacations and travel destinations (Lončarić, Dlačić, & Perišić Prodan, 2018). Thus, marketing activities that enhance customers' perceived experience are critical for an integrated resort to stand out from the rest.

Tourism and hospitality brand marketing requires a new approach that can enhance customers' engagement (Ahn & Back, 2018b; Chathoth, Ungson, Harrington, & Chan, 2016; Keller, 2001; So, King, & Sparks, 2014; So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016). Global customers look for destinations where they can have memorable and unique experiences (Kim, 2014; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Sipe & Testa, 2018; Tukamushaba, Xiao, & Ladkin, 2016). In

previous literature, managing customers' experience with tourism and hospitality brands has been found to be an important factor in customer satisfaction (Ali, Amin, & Cobanoglu, 2016; Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2014; Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2015), behavioral intention (Barnes et al., 2014; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Loureiro, 2014), and engagement (Ahn & Back, 2018b). As a developing country, Croatian customers prefer an integrated resort facility, which is a one-stop entertainment hub that features casinos, hotels, shopping malls, and meeting spaces (Wan, 2015). Integrated resorts offer unique experiential value to customers, as well as provide guidelines for other service providers in Croatia (Ahn & Back, 2018a).

Customer engagement has been identified and conceptualized in previous studies (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011; Keller, 2013; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Brand engagement refers to the level of customer's motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind; it is characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities in direct brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011). The ultimate goal of service providers and marketers is to build a strong relationship with customers; thus, engagement between customers and brands is essential (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Clark, 2011; Nammir, Marane, & Ali, 2012). Furthermore, creating customer engagement through service experience leads to satisfaction, behavioral intention, and relationship (Dwivedi, 2015; Sashi, 2012; Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore, a strong

brand engagement can lead to success of tourism and hospitality brands. Considerable research has been conducted on customer experience and engagement. However, little is known of customers' experiential value, especially for integrated resorts in emerging markets like Croatia.

The present study examines the multidimensional structure of the experience value (e.g. atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence) of integrated resort customers and identifies the factors that affect brand engagement. It contributes to tourism and hospitality literature in three ways. First, the tourism and hospitality industry must understand customers' experience. Customers' experiential value is essential for marketing activities. Second, this empirical investigation is the first attempt to examine the conceptual framework of the value of customer experience in the emerging market, such as the integrated resort industry in Croatia. Third, the findings provide guidelines for integrated resort service providers in building a strong and positive brand engagement with customers, which leads to sustainable business growth. Thus, this study is distinguished from previous literature by (1) focusing on integrated resort industry which is different with traditional resorts by including both gambling and non-gambling facilities and large size to provide various services such as meetings, educations, entertainment, and shopping activities; (2) considering multidimensional experiential value along with both tangible and intangible attributes; and (3) conducting the study in neglected area (e.g. Croatia) of integrated resort research.

## Literature review

### *Croatian tourism and hospitality industry*

Croatia's tourism and hospitality industry has been operating for more than 170 years. This long-term presence has made tourism the largest and most important generator of economic development in Croatia. In 2017, tourism comprised 19.6% of Croatia's GDP, and it has been increasing annually (Croatian National Bank, 2018). According to Croatian National Bank (2018), tourism revenues from foreign visitors amounted to € 9.5 billion in 2017, representing an increase of 10% compared to 2016. In the same year, 17.4 million tourist arrivals and 86.2 million tourist nights were recorded, which represent 13% and 11% (93% international tourists, and 7% domestic tourists) increase, respectively, compared with 2016. Most foreign tourists (79%) who spend the night in Croatia were from Germany (24%), Slovenia (9%), Austria (9%), Poland (8%), Italy (6%), Czech Republic (6%), Great Britain (5%), Netherlands, Hungary, and Slovakia (each 4%). The

remaining 21% of tourist nights were from other countries (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The forecasts show that by 2028, international tourist arrivals in Croatia will reach 26.9 million (WTTC, 2018, p. 5).

In 2017 travel and tourism directly supported 138,000 jobs (10.1% of total employment), while their total contribution to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry was 23.5%. Visitor exports generated 39.0% of total exports in 2017, while investment in travel and tourism in the same year accounted for 10.9% of total investment (WTTC, 2018, p. 1). Tourism is the largest contributor to Croatia's economy (Croatian National Bank, 2018). However, its hospitality industry remains far behind compared with most developed countries, such as France, USA, and Spain (Hendija, Kesar, & Bucar, 2018). In Croatia, there is a lack of international hotel brands and a small share of hotels in total accommodation capacity. International hotel brands have been slow to enter the Croatian market, in 2017 there were only 15 of them compared to Spain which had 71 international hotel brands (Horwath HTL, 2017, pp. 21 & 75). On the other hand, the largest share of hotel facilities in Croatia is still categorized with 3 stars (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, p. 26). Most accommodations in Croatia are private houses and camps; only 23.6% of all accommodations are hotels (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, pp. 26 & 27). Moreover, only a small percentage can be categorized as an integrated resort, which is a new business practice in Croatia. Therefore, for international tourists, Croatia is not predominantly oriented to hotel guests and rather is more oriented to those who stay in private accommodations during high season. Hence, the hotel industry in Croatia is not yet a dominant and determining force of tourism because available accommodations are fragmented, unorganized, and oriented to the holiday season business (Cavlek, Bartoluci, Prebezac, & Kesar, 2011, p. 167).

Hotel accommodations in Croatia are mainly of medium quality. The structure of their products is not developed. Approximately 45% of hotel rooms are located in three-star hotels, whereas 39% are located in four-star hotels. Of the total number of hotels, only 5% are five-star hotels, whereas 10% are two-star hotels (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Croatia has a scarcity of international hotel brands. No significant improvement has been observed over the past few years, especially among luxury and upscale hotels. The most prominent international brands in Croatia are Melia Hotels, Park Plaza Hotels, Falkensteiner, Radisson Blu, Sheraton, Rixos, and Starwood H&R, among others (Horwath HTL, 2017, p. 22). All of these hotels are considered integrated resorts. Although their target market is clients with a higher budget, by implementing additional services like convention centers, meeting rooms, wellness,

and spa facilities, restaurants and bars, shopping malls, or casinos, they are trying to attract not just tourists but local people as well, by offering them various experiences.

Croatia is one of the most popular destinations for summer vacation in Europe. It attracts visitors more with the quality of its natural environment and the richness of its cultural and historical heritage, than the quality, availability, and diversity of its new generation tourist attractions (The Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013, p. 5). Its revenues from foreign visitors grow at 10% rate in 2017 compared to 2016 (Croatian National Bank, 2018), while the number of international tourists grow by 9% in 2016, which is the third best result in Southern and Mediterranean Europe, right after Portugal and Spain (UNWTO, 2017, p. 7). Those trends indicate Croatia's potential for more rapid growth in the tourism and hospitality industry in the future. New opportunities have been found that could improve customer spending by offering various experiences through integrated resorts.

### *Integrated resort customers' experiential value*

Value has been widely used in previous studies to understand customer behaviors (Jiang, Luk, & Cardinali, 2018; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Petrick, 2002; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). According to Zeithaml (1988), the common features of value are price, trade-off between costs and customers' perceived benefits, trade-off between customers' perception of product quality and price, and overall assessment of individual worth. Customer value is defined as "what customers get (benefits, quality, worth, utility) from the purchase and use of a product versus what they pay (price, costs, sacrifices), resulting in attitude toward, or an emotional bond with the product" (Smith & Colgate, 2007, p. 8). Most previous studies considered value as a ratio of benefit to cost, which is line with Zeithaml (1988)'s first characteristic of value. However, some researchers recognize the importance of customers' preference, belief, subjective, and emotional reaction to consumption experience (Havlena & Holbrook, 1986; Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlström, 2012; Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristensson, & Magnusson, 2008; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Woodruff, 1997). Helkkula et al. (2012) suggest the importance of understanding customers' service experience value to develop service innovation. Similarly, the authors of the present study also applied this conceptualization of customer value of integrated resort experience. The multidimensional perspectives of customer value have been identified in previous research (Carlson, Rosenberger, & Rahman, 2016; Lapierre, 2000; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001; Petrick, 2002; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Babin, Darden, and Griffin (1994) proposed utilitarian value associated with the task-related and rational aspects of the shopping and hedonic value,

which is related to entertainment and emotional aspect of shopping. By contrast, Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) proposed five value dimensions including functional (utilitarian), social (image and symbolism), emotional (feeling and affect), epidemic, and conditional values. According to Smith and Colgate (2007), customer value is examined using four dimensions including functional/instrumental, experiential/hedonic, symbolic/expressive, and cost/sacrifice. Although a difference can be observed in the number and types of dimensions, these studies have supported the multidimensional characteristics of customer value with service experience.

Customers' perceived value of service experience is important (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Xie, Xiong, Chen, & Hu, 2015). According to Mathwick et al. (2001), the experiential value is defined as "interactions involving either direct usage or distanced appreciation of goods and services" (p. 41). Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2002) also suggested four dimensions of experiential value including atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence. According to them, service brands should provide an attractive environment, playful experience, and efficient and excellent service, which lead to satisfaction and behavioral intention. Interestingly, in tourism and hospitality industry, Mathwick et al.'s (2002) four dimensions of experience value is used widely as a predictor of customers' future behavior. Meanwhile, in the luxury restaurant setting, Wu and Liang (2009) found that the restaurant's environment, as well as its interaction with service employees and other customers influence customers' experiential value, which leads to satisfaction. Tsai & Wang (2017) suggested the effects of consumer return on investment on a place's culinary image, which significantly influences customers' behavioral intentions toward food tourism. These studies support the usefulness of managing the distinct nature of the four constructs of experiential value (e.g. atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence) to understand customer behavior.

### *Customers' engagement with the integrated resort brand*

Customer engagement is a recent concept in marketing literature and it has expanded the domain of relationship marketing (Vivek et al., 2012). Customer brand engagement is considered as a priority in branding strategies (Hollebeek, 2011) because of its significant role in the customer decision-making process (Bowden, 2009). Customer engagement with brand is the level of an individual customer's motivational and context-dependent state of mind, and it influences brand loyalty which refers to repeated purchases (behavioral loyalty) prompted by

a strong internal disposition (attitudinal loyalty) over a period (Day, 1969). Thus, research on customer engagement has focused on the role of such engagement in customers' future behavior. For instance, Chu and Kim (2011) examined the impact of customer engagement, such as tie strength, trust, normative, and informational influence, on the online word-of-mouth behavior of customers in a social networking site. Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2013) suggested that multidimensional customer engagement in a virtual brand community is related to customer satisfaction, loyalty, connection, empowerment, emotional bond, trust, and commitment.

To adhere to this trend in marketing literature, research on the tourism and hospitality academic has focused on the nature and dynamics of customer engagement (Cabiddu, De Carlo, & Piccoli, 2014; Chathoth et al., 2014). So et al. (2014) suggested that customer engagement such as identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction, and the scale was validated by using hotel and airline customers. Furthermore, the positive impact of customer engagement on loyalty was verified by the study. Similarly, Cabiddu et al. (2014) identified the role of customer engagement in the social media context. Although previous studies have provided evidence on the importance of customer engagement, there are limited studies to examine its antecedents to provide a better understanding of the conceptual framework.

### *Proposed model of integrated resort customers' experiential value*

In reference to Mathwick et al. (2002), the present study considers customer experience as a multidimensional construct that includes atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence. When customers use integrated resorts, they evaluate their experience using these dimensions, which serves as antecedents of satisfaction and behavior. Traditionally, tourism and hospitality service managers have focused on stimulating customers' sensory experience (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013; Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2014; Ali et al., 2016; Kim & Perdue, 2013; Kivela & Crotts, 2006). In the integrated resort setting, managing sensory experience is critical because it builds cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagements, which lead to future intention to revisit (Ahn & Back, 2018b). Moreover, creating a positive atmosphere is important as Croatia's integrated resort industry grows and competition among local and international brands increases. Sensory attributes, such as interior, design of floor, music, cleanness, and uniforms can influence customers' perceived experiential value of atmosphere (Turley & Chebat, 2002). Based on S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response)

framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the atmospheres of integrated resorts are the stimuli of affective states, which influence customers' responses toward the experience. Atmospheric factors (e.g. music, scent, color, interior, exterior, and mood) influence customers' engagement with the hotels' products and services (Poncin & Mimoun, 2014). Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated.

**H1:** The atmosphere of an integrated resort has a positive influence on customers' engagement.

Mathwick et al. (2001) suggested playfulness as a dimension of experience value with service experience. Playfulness is related to escapism, which is the feeling that can attract customers (Unger & Kernan, 1983). In the integrated resort setting, enjoyment, interest, fun, and curiosity form the experience. A growing number of customers use tourism and hospitality service because it promotes well-being activities, such as getting away from work-related stress and relieving daily anxiety. The playful or hedonic value is associated with customers' amusement and positive emotion (Bellenger, Steinberg, & Stanton, 1976; Tsai & Wang, 2017). The playfulness of experience is reflected in the intrinsic enjoyment and engagement with the integrated resort brand. Similarly, Tomaselli, Sanchez, and Brown (2015) suggested how customers' perception of playful experience affects their level of engagement. Playfulness is one of the important factors associated with customers' autonomy needs satisfaction. Satisfaction of autonomy needs affects the degree of customers' engagement and interaction with the service (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Iwasaki & Mannell, 1999; Thomson, 2006). Many customers expect not only utilitarian value but also hedonic value through entertaining and playful travel experiences. Thus, the playfulness of integrated resort experience is related to the customers' engagement with the integrated resort experience and brand.

**H2:** The playfulness of an integrated resort has a positive influence on customers' engagement.

Return on investment experience is central to service marketing (Narayanan, Desiraju, & Chintagunta, 2004; Rust, Lemon, & Zeithaml, 2004). It is important in the tourism industry (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O'Leary, 2006). It is related to customers' positive input of finances, time, and emotion (Dwyer, Pham, Forsyth, & Spurr, 2014; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Mathwick et al. (2001) suggested that return on investment is an active extrinsic value composed from money related investment and efficiency. The effect of experiential value includes return on investment in customers' attitude (Mathwick et al., 2001). Gutiérrez-Cillán, Camarero-Izquierdo, and San José-Cabezudo (2017) also

found the relationship between experiential value and customers' engagement toward the social media brand page. One of the fundamental factors of service quality is technical quality, which is related to customers' perception of actual outcomes or core services (Seth, Deshmukh, & Vrat, 2005). It is reflected by return on investment, which allows customers to achieve their financial objectives (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Customers are likely to perceive a high level of technical quality if they have a high level of return on investment (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Excellent service quality can influence customers' engagement, which includes commitment and connection with the integrated resort brand (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek, 2011). New technology, in integrated resort industry, helps demonstrate a return on investment by increasing output (e.g. sharing experience with others), lower cost (e.g. comparing prices across OTA), maintaining customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction (e.g. live chat via brand website), providing customized experience (e.g. Amazon Echo in guestrooms), and maximizing service efficiency (e.g. self-check-in kiosk). Thus, integrated resort brands may increase customers' perceived efficiency and lower perceived cost, and customers' engagement is derived by a level of return on investment.

**H3:** The return on investment of an integrated resort has a positive influence on customers' engagement.

Previous studies provide insights into the relationship between service quality and customers engagement toward the brand (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Parasuraman et al. (1988) found that responsiveness and empathy has an effect on customers' engagement with service brand. Similarly, according to Mathwick et al. (2001), experiential value is related to the perceived benefits of service excellence. Service excellence is related to customers' evaluation of service quality during and after the integrated resort experience, which includes service efficiency and employees' attitudes and behaviors (Yuan & Wu, 2008). A high level of service excellence influences customers' relational construct toward the brand, including commitment and trust (Sahin, Zehir, & Kitapci, 2012). As Keller and Lehmann (2006) noted, customers' relationship with brand is related to design and developed of good services such as new interactive services based on service innovation. Therefore, the current authors predict that service excellence generates favorable customers' psychological attachment toward the integrated resort brand. Hence, following proposition is presented:

**H4:** The service excellence of an integrated resort has a positive influence on customers' engagement.

Service brand managers must find ways to create and maintain customers' satisfaction and positive behavioral intention. Brand engagement is important because of its effects on customers' attitude and behavior (So et al., 2014, 2016). In brand management literature, customers' engagement with activities was found to have an impact on their positive evaluation of service and future consumption behavior (Vivek et al., 2012). Customers are likely to be satisfied and loyal to brands when they increase their engagement in various travel activities (Sheng, Simpson, & Siguaw, 2017). Moreover, customers' engagement is the antecedent of brand satisfaction and loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011; van Doorn et al., 2010). The present study also investigated the effects of customer engagement on their satisfaction and behavioral intention. Accordingly, the authors hypothesized that customer engagement enhances brand satisfaction and behavioral intention.

**H5:** Customer engagement with the integrated resort positively influences brand satisfaction.

**H6:** Customer engagement with the integrated resort positively influences revisit intention.

Moreover, the current study suggests that customer satisfaction can influence the strength of behavioral intention toward the hotel, casino, restaurant, and brand. The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intention has been identified in the hospitality and tourism literature (Chan, Hsu, & Baum, 2015; Getty & Thompson, 1994; Han & Back, 2006; Han & Ryu, 2007; Tsaur, Chiu, & Wang, 2007). Getty and Thompson (1994) suggested that a high level of customer satisfaction leads repurchase and recommendation intention. Han and Ryu (2007) also found the relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention in the restaurant setting. Therefore, building a strong and high level of satisfaction is a major factor in creating positive behavioral intention.

**H7:** Customers' satisfaction with the integrated resort positively influences revisit intention.

Figure 1 describes the antecedents (e.g. atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence) and outcomes (e.g. customers' satisfaction and behavioral intention) of customer engagement with integrated resort brands.

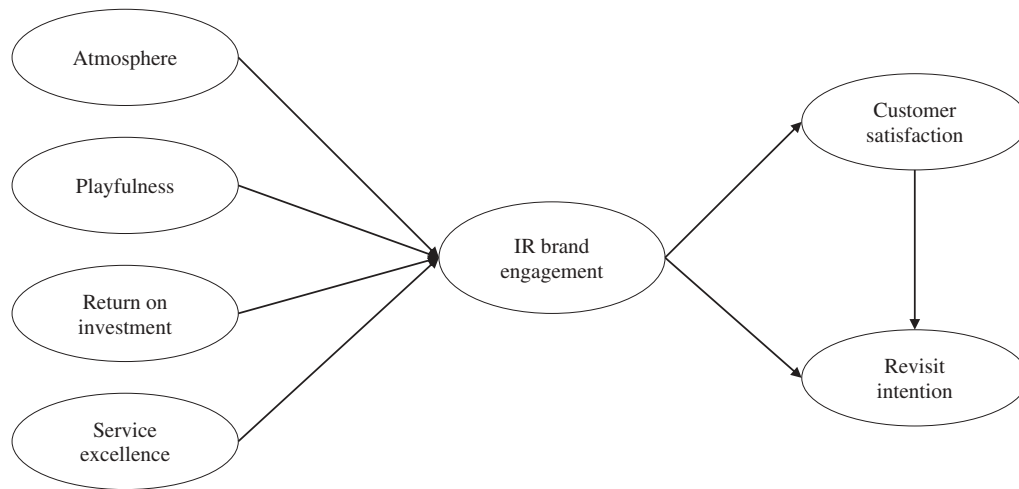


Figure 1. Experiential value in the integrated resort setting.

## Methodology

### Measurement

Customer experiential value was measured based on Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon's (2001) scale for atmosphere (e.g. This integrated resort had attractive interior design and décor), playfulness (e.g. Staying at this integrated resort makes me feel like I am in another world), return on investment (e.g. Staying at this integrated resort is an efficient way to manage my time), and service excellence (e.g. When I think of this integrated resort, I think of excellence). According to Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009), brand engagement is an outcome of experiential value. Customer satisfaction was measured based on the scale developed by Ryu, Han, and Kim (2008). Revisit intention was measured using the scale developed by Wu, Li, and Li (2018). All items were measured using 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

### Data collection

An on-site survey was conducted at major integrated resorts in Zagreb, capital of Croatia on April 19 and April 20, 2018. A total of 21 well-trained graduate students participated voluntarily and provided information in the study. The students were divided into groups of two and placed in different integrated resorts. Data were collected during the whole two days of the on-site survey, from 9 am till 7 pm. The instrument for collecting data was highly structured paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The survey questions were then translated into Croatian by an independent translator and back-translated by researchers (Sperber, Devellis, & Boehlecke, 1994).

Integrated resort customers aged over 18 were allowed to participate in the survey. Screening questions were used to determine whether a respondent could represent the sample. Respondents were asked to identify integrated resort brands and the times they visited the resort in last three years. A total of 357 integrated resort customers who satisfied the criteria participated in the study.

### Demographic characteristics

From the 357 responses, 4 cases were excluded due to missing values. Thus, a total of 354 subjects were used for data analysis. In order to measure the demographic characteristics of participants, the authors used multiple choice questions, such as "what is your gender? Male/female". The sample consisted of 43.2% males and 56.5% females. A total of 46.0% of the respondents were 20–26 years old; 27.4% were 25–34; 16.6% were over 35 years old (Table 1). The majority of respondents completed high school (42.7%), whereas others had a college degree (40.4%).

## Results

### Measurement model test

The measurement model was examined using the partial least square-structural equation modeling technique (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was utilized because it is suitable for analyzing small data, as well as avoiding multicollinearity and measurement error (Koh, Demirbag, Bayraktar, Tatoglu, & Zaim, 2007). Also, Ali, Rasoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Ryu (2018) suggested, PLS-SEM has not required a specific data distribution compared to CB-SEM. PLS-SEM is used

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	153	43.2
Female	200	56.5
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
20–24	163	46.0
25–34	97	27.4
35–50	65	18.4
50 and above	29	8.2
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Didn't finish high school	8	2.3
Finish high school	151	42.7
At least some college	143	40.4
Some post-graduate education	28	7.9
Doctorate	23	6.5

widely in hospitality and tourism studies because of its many advantages compared with traditional SEM technique (Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2017; Carlson et al., 2016; Deng, Yeh, & Sung, 2013). Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics of the measurement model. Its convergent validity was tested by examining the statistical significance of factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability (CR) (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). All factor loadings were significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Moreover, the AVE value for all constructs were greater than 0.50. The CR and Dijkstra-Henseler's indicator (Rho A) of each construct were over 0.70 (Table 3). Thus, the convergent validity of the constructs was acceptable. The discriminant validity was tested by comparing the values for AVE and the square root of the correlation of each pair of constructs (Table 4). In addition, to confirm discriminant validity, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) matrix was used and, as shown in Table 5, all computed were lower than 0.85 thresholds (Albert, Ambroise, & Valette-Florence, 2017).

### Structural model test

PLS-SEM was used to examine the relationships among multidimensional experiential value, customer engagement, brand satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Among the four experiential value variables, two had significant influence on brand engagement. Playfulness ( $b = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and service excellence ( $b = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) had a positive effect on customer engagement with integrated resort. Hence, Hypotheses 2 and 4 were supported: the playfulness and service excellence value significantly and positively influence customer satisfaction. However, atmosphere and return on investment did not significantly lead to customers' perceived connection with the brand. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 3 were not supported by the data: the atmosphere and return on investment did not significantly and positively influence customer satisfaction with the integrated resort. Experiential value dimensions explained 22% of customers' engagement with the integrated resort brand

**Table 2.** Descriptive analysis.

Construct/associated items	Mean	SD
<b>Atmosphere (ATM)</b>		
1. This integrated resort (IR) had attractive interior design and décor.	5.33	1.53
2. The background music is pleasing.	5.18	1.48
3. This IR was thoroughly clean.	5.38	1.44
4. Employees are neat and well dressed.	5.70	3.47
<b>Playfulness (PLA)</b>		
1. Staying at this IR makes me feel like I am in another world.	3.60	1.83
2. I get so involved when I stay at this IR that I forget everything else.	3.61	1.83
<b>Return on Investment (ROI)</b>		
1. Staying at this IR is an efficient way to manage my time.	3.67	1.77
2. Staying at this IR makes my life easier.	3.51	1.74
3. Staying at this IR fits with my schedule.	4.16	1.72
<b>Service Excellence (SE)</b>		
1. When I think of this IR, I think of excellence.	4.27	1.71
2. I think of this IR as an expert it offers .	4.24	1.68
<b>Brand Engagement (BE)</b>		
1. I consider this IR brand to be a part of myself.	2.96	1.67
2. I often feel a personal connection between this IR brand and me.	2.91	1.66
3. I Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.	3.09	1.72
4. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with this IR brand I most prefer.	2.85	1.58
5. I can identify with important brands in my life.	3.18	1.66
6. There are links between this IR brand that I prefer and how I view myself.	3.02	1.63
7. My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.	3.36	1.75
<b>Customer Satisfaction (CS)</b>		
1. I am very satisfied with my overall experience at this IR.	4.50	1.64
2. Overall, this IR puts me in a good mood.	4.49	1.60
3. I have really enjoyed myself at this IR.	4.69	1.55
<b>Revisit Intention (RI)</b>		
1. If I could, I would come to this IR again.	4.91	1.55
2. I always consider this IR ark to be the first one choice.	4.21	1.63
3. I have a strong intention to visit IR park again.	4.82	1.55

( $R^2 = 0.22$ ). Hypotheses 5 and 6 regarding the effect of brand engagement on both satisfaction ( $b = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and behavioral intention ( $b = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were supported. Lastly, Hypothesis 7 was also supported: customer satisfaction had a significant effect on behavioral intention ( $b = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The proposed model explains 18% of customers' satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.18$ ) and 57% of revisit intention of integrated resort customers ( $R^2 = 0.57$ ). Table 6 shows the results of hypotheses testing.

### Discussion and conclusion

The present study expanded customers' experiential value model via an on-site survey among Croatian integrated resort customers. The proposed framework is useful in explaining experiential values of the integrated resort in emerging destinations. This study provides guidance on how integrated resort service providers and marketers should improve experiential value to leverage customers' satisfaction and behavioral intention through enhancing their engagement with the integrated resort brand. The findings help service providers and marketers in determining what



**Table 3.** Assessment results of the measurement model.

Construct/associated items	Loading	rho-A	CR	AVE
Atmosphere (ATM)		0.84	0.88	0.64
A11	0.86			
A12	0.81			
A13	0.72			
A14	0.80			
Playfulness (PLA)		0.89	0.94	0.89
PLA1	0.94			
PLA2	0.94			
Return on Investment (ROI)		0.91	0.88	0.72
ROI1	0.83			
ROI2	0.92			
ROI3	0.78			
Service Excellence (SE)		0.84	0.92	0.85
SE1	0.93			
SE2	0.92			
Brand Engagement (BE)		0.89	0.92	0.67
BE1	0.78			
BE2	0.76			
BE3	0.82			
BE4	0.89			
BE5	0.85			
BE6	0.79			
BE7				
Customer Satisfaction (CS)		0.84	0.93	0.81
CS1	0.87			
CS2	0.93			
CS3	0.89			
Revisit Intention (RI)		0.87	0.91	0.77
RI1	0.88			
RI2	0.88			
RI3	0.87			

**Table 4.** Discriminant validity.

Construct	ATM	PLA	ROI	SE	BE	CS	RI
Atmosphere (ATM)	0.80						
Playfulness (PLA)	0.32	0.94					
Return on Investment (ROI)	0.27	0.54	0.85				
Service Excellence (SE)	0.35	0.51	0.60	0.92			
Brand Engagement (BE)	0.17	0.43	0.38	0.42	0.82		
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.35	0.24	0.37	0.38	0.45	0.90	
Revisit Intention (RI)	0.35	0.31	0.32	0.45	0.46	0.74	0.88

**Table 5.** HTMT matrix.

Construct	ATM	PLA	ROI	SE	BE	CS	RI
Atmosphere (ATM)							
Playfulness (PLA)	0.34						
Return on Investment (ROI)	0.34	0.65					
Service Excellence (SE)	0.41	0.60	0.74				
Brand Engagement (BE)	0.21	0.46	0.34	0.46			
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.29	0.24	0.36	0.34	0.45		
Revisit Intention (RI)	0.37	0.36	0.40	0.52	0.53	0.79	

**Table 6.** Results of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Relationships	Path coefficient	t-statistics	p-value	Confidence interval	Supported
H1	Atmosphere → Brand engagement	-0.02	0.46	0.65	[-0.07, 0.11]	Not supported
H2	Playfulness → Brand engagement	0.27	4.43	0.00	[0.12, 0.36]	Supported
H3	Return on investment → Brand engagement	0.11	1.71	0.09	[-0.05, 0.21]	Not supported
H4	Service excellence → Brand engagement	0.22	3.96	0.00	[0.10, 0.34]	Supported
H5	Brand engagement → Customer satisfaction	0.45	12.01	0.00	[0.34, 0.51]	Supported
H6	Brand engagement → Revisit intention	0.13	3.45	0.01	[0.09, 0.26]	Supported
H7	Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.71	20.74	0.00	[0.57, 0.76]	Supported

experiential value motivate customers' positive behavior in the future. Also, it is important to remember that customers' satisfaction and behavioral intention are influenced by multiple experiential value and the impact of these values varies. Therefore, the authors argue the importance of considering how integrated resort service providers manage experiential value to maximize its effect on customers' behavior. For instance, in gambling-operation focused integrated resort, the impact of playfulness on customers' attitude compared to a leisure-oriented integrated resort. In this study, the findings suggest that Croatian customers perceive value in playfulness and service excellence compared to the atmosphere and return on investment. Therefore, this study identifies possible antecedents driving integrated resort customers' decision-making process by reflecting their value perception of various types of experience in Croatia.

### Theoretical implications

The study provides theoretical implications for tourism and hospitality literature. First, the study confirmed the conceptualization of customers' experiential value, which captures customer engagement with the brand. This study provides a theoretically applied approach to examining customers' perception of experiential values toward the tourism and hospitality brands. In the previous studies, most of studies have focused economic perspective of value (e.g. Jae Lee & Back, 2005). Furthermore, most experiential value studies were conducted in the retail setting (Keng, Huang, Zheng, & Hsu, 2007; Mathwick et al., 2001). Thus, the findings of this study contribute to tourism and hospitality literature to enhance brand management knowledge about the concept of experiential values underlying customers' post-purchase attitude and behavior.

Second, similar to the previous studies (Ali et al., 2016), the results support the multidimensional structure of customers' experiential value including atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence values in the integrated resort setting. Atmosphere value includes service environment,

including visual and audial elements of integrated resort. Playfulness value is associated with the hedonic and eudaimonic values by providing opportunities for relieving stress. Return on investment value is reflected in managing the time and schedule via experience. Service excellence value is expected as a fundamental element of tourism and hospitality service. Integrated resort has been characterized as a complex building that provides various service functions (e.g. casino, hotel, shopping, and convention). In this study, customers expect to gain playfulness and service excellence experiences. Compared with well-known integrated resort destinations, such as Macau and Las Vegas, Croatian customers are less likely to rely on atmosphere and return on investment. Moreover, customer engagement with integrated resort has a significant effect on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention. Customers who perceive a strong and positive connection with the brand satisfy their experience and build a revisit intention in future.

Lastly, the findings provide the importance of managing customers' engagement with the integrated resort brand. Customers' experience without involvement may not create a high level of customers' satisfaction and revisit intention. In other words, customers' affective and conative attitude toward the tourism and hospitality brands can be increased when customers more closely linked to brand itself. It provides implications for scholars by examining the effects of experiential value on customer engagement with the integrated resort. For future studies, it might be useful to test a causal relationship between experience and engagement. When applying the proposed model, researchers can understand cognitive-based experiential value perceptions as important factors in determining the post-purchase affective and conative attitude of customers. Given the importance of the concept of customers' engagement (Ahn & Back, 2018a) in the integrated resort setting, several differences on the relative effects of multidimensional experiential value on engagement were observed, thereby providing guidelines for future researchers. When applying the multidimensional model, tourism and hospitality researchers will find a crucial antecedent of customers' post-purchase satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Customers' evaluation process is followed by a sequence of cognition (engagement), affective (satisfaction), and behavior.

### **Practical implications**

This study has implications for practitioners. Most tourism and hospitality service providers aim to build a strong connection with customers to enhance their

performance and achieve sustainable growth. This study reveals customers who perceive high playfulness and service excellence are likely to develop positive engagement with integrated resorts. The majority of Croatian integrated resort customers pay additional attention in evaluating the fun experience and the degree of service quality while using integrated resort service. Thus, integrated resort service providers need to develop marketing programs to deliver customers' experiential value to customers (e.g. new scents of guest-rooms, playful game via mobile application, customized loyalty program, training employees). In addition, customers' engagement influences their satisfaction future behavioral intention. Thus, creating and maintaining a high level of customer engagement with the brand is important. Enhancing connection and interaction with customers using technology (e.g. social media platform, mobile application) can influence the evaluation of integrated resort experience and revisit intention.

Integrated resort marketers are encouraged to investigate the proposed experiential value in developing marketing strategies. Moreover, satisfaction and behavioral intention is caused by perceived experiential value and engagement with the integrated resort brand. Thus, marketers focus on a specific experiential value (e.g. atmosphere, playfulness, return on investment, and service excellence) for strategic thinking. Moreover, the survey (e.g. using room-devices/mobile phones and conducting a check-out survey) can be conducted using the proposed questionnaire to understand and predict customers' behavior. The result of the survey can identify which type of experience might negatively influence customers' relationship with the integrated resort brand.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Although this study provides valuable implications, its findings are limited. First, the study was conducted in Croatia, thus findings have limited generalizability. More specifically, the relative effects of experiential value might be different in other cultures. Thus, further studies can examine the cultural differences in the relationship between experiential value and engagement. The proposed framework allows researchers to strengthen brand management knowledge about the differential influence of culture underlying customers' value perception and post-purchase behavior. Second, the current study was conducted within the context of the integrated resort. However, the different target market and types of facilities across brands may behave in a different way. For

instance, customers expect a high level of return on investment when they use local-based economy integrated resorts. On the other hand, a high level of service excellence is required when customers use luxury integrated resort brands. Thus, future research should consider the moderating impact of types of integrated resorts (e.g. senior customer targeted, gambling customer targeted, high-end customer targeted) on the relationships developed in this study. Additionally, it would be useful to identify the nature of the experiential value across facilities (e.g. casino, hotel, restaurant, convention, shops) in the same integrated resort. Finally, the current study cannot provide insight into the potential moderating effects of visiting purpose within the model developed above. Although examining the moderating effect of individual customers' visiting purpose is beyond the scope of the major purpose of this study, the study can be expanded to including assessing the effects of experiential value on brand engagement, brand satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Accordingly, the authors suggested that future research can add a moderating effect of visiting purpose, as well as other demographic factors (e.g. gender, age, income, education), within the context of research framework.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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