

Metaverse in Hospitality and Tourism: A Focus on Customer Perceived Value and Experience

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Abstract *In recent years, there has been significant academic discourse surrounding the transformation of hospitality and tourism offerings into metaverse experiences. However, how the metaverse will affect the customer is still not clear as it is in the early phase of development. Drawing on a multidisciplinary perspective on metaverse, we develop and propose a conceptual framework to explore the associations between customer perceived value, and experience. The premise is that perceived value serves as a catalyst for customers' experience with the metaverse. This value can be delineated into utilitarian, hedonic, and social dimensions. We delve into the metaverse experience, considering its diverse facets encompassing cognitive, affective, social, and sensory elements. This multifaceted nature underscores the complexity of the customer experience. We propose a value-experience-intention model grounded on uses and gratification theory, and the stimulus-organism-response framework. In conclusion, we propose an agenda for future research aimed at expanding the theoretical and practical knowledge of the metaverse.*

Keywords: Metaverse, Tourism, Customer Experience, Customer Value, Value-Experience-Intention Model

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, made a significant announcement regarding the rebranding of Facebook to Meta. This pivotal move has sparked immense interest from industry leaders, technology experts, government officials, policymakers, and academics, all of whom have turned their attention to the concept of the metaverse (Wei, 2023). Originally appearing in the novel *Snow Crash* written by Neal Stephenson, the metaverse can be described as the decentralised and three-dimensional evolution of the internet—a new critical space or spaces built on emerging technologies that create a sense of physical presence in the digital world. This technological evolution is poised to disrupt various sectors including hospitality and tourism (Chen, 2023). Recognizing that hospitality and tourism is an integral part of the experience economy, the World Economic Forum has acknowledged the potential

benefits of the metaverse in the hospitality and tourism industry (WEF, 2022). Therefore, businesses in hospitality are keen to invest in the metaverse to capitalize on its potential to produce virtual hospitality and tourism products and services. The metaverse has the potential to influence the attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes of tourists by offering immersive experiences (Lin, et al., 2023; Gursoy et al., 2022).

The metaverse holds the promise of enhancing the customer's end-to-end travel experience. It enables customers to virtually explore hotels, flights, and holiday destinations, allowing them to “try before you buy”. As a result, there is a growing consumer trend towards embracing metaverse-based hospitality and tourism products and services. Although it is widely recognized that the metaverse cannot completely replace physical travel, recent technological advancements, particularly in virtual reality (VR) headsets, have paved the way for metaverse

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applications in the hospitality and tourism sector (Rather, 2023). These applications offer users an elevated level of immersion, enabling consumers to engage in virtual globetrotting (Gursoy et al., 2022).

Metaverse, at present is mostly at the conceptual stage of development, rather than being an established commercial reality. It is still evolving, and some argue that it is still in an infancy stage (Buhalis et al., 2023). The maturity phase of the metaverse is projected to be witnessed in 2030 (Deloitte, 2022). It is expected to bring a fundamental change in consumer behavior and marketing as customers move from the physical to virtual world, they engage in what may be considered a virtual tour. Metaverse offers a unique opportunity to experience virtual tours of hotels, restaurants, hospitality experiences and tourist attractions that are fundamentally distinct from conventional settings of tourism. These immersive experiences provide huge prospects for hospitality and tourism; however, research exploring customers' motivations to adopt this innovation is scant in literature. Further, it is an innovative platform that helps managers and professionals in the hospitality industry connect and engage with potential tourists. However, to maximise the potential benefits of the metaverse, it is imperative to understand how the metaverse creates various types of experiences, considering the multidimensional nature of the customer experience (Baloglu et al., 2019).

Based on the above discussion, there are several questions that are unanswered and need to be understood by the stakeholders. For instance, what are the perceived values that will motivate the customer to use the metaverse? What are the different types of metaverse experiences considering the multidimensional nature of the customer experience? What are the determinants that can be used to forecast the behavioral inclination of customers towards adopting the metaverse? Extant literature in the hospitality setting has not yet reported anything related to these underlying questions. This paper elucidates some crucial conceptual difficulties in metaverse research and suggests various propositions based on the exiting body of knowledge through critical examinations. First, we have put forth a theoretical framework including three distinct perceived values: utilitarian, hedonic, and social values. These values are posited to exert an influence on customers' decision-making processes with regard to their adoption and use of the metaverse. These values are hypothesized in line with the uses and gratification theory (UGT) (Choi et al., 2016). Second, the metaverse experience was conceptualized in relation to cognitive, emotive, sensory, and social characteristics. Third, we have proposed a conceptual framework known as the Value-Experience-Intention (VEI) model. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of UGT and Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, our model aims to highlight the variables influencing customers'

behavioral intention to utilize the metaverse. The proposed paradigm posits perceived value as the stimulus, customer experience as the organism, and behavioral intention as the response. Finally, based on the propositions, a future research agenda is proposed.

To articulate these assumptions, we conducted a rigorous examination of various discourses surrounding the concept of the metaverse. This comprehensive analysis is grounded in a thorough critical review of scholarly literature concerning customer experience, perceived value, and behavioural intention within the online realm. Due to the limited scholarly articles focused on the metaverse, we also used reports and online content related to the metaverse. Finally, an in-depth analysis of all accessible resources was done to explore the conceptual development to put forward the propositions and theoretical model.

Given its nascent stage of adoption in the hospitality and tourism industry, this conceptual paper provides a theoretical insight for hospitality managers and academicians. The main scope of this research is to theoretically conceptualize the factors influencing the users to adopt metaverse, with a goal to further propel the discussion on metaverse within the hospitality and tourism industry. The study provides a deeper and richer understanding of customer perceived value and experience in metaverse technology. The significance of our study also lies in its capacity to assist hospitality and tourism leaders and experts in efficiently harnessing the potential of metaverse as a platform to augment customer experience.

CUSTOMER PERCEIVED VALUE AND METAVERSE

The determination of customer perceived value is crucial in assessing the extent to which a product or service can effectively fulfil the demands and expectations of customers. Any technological innovations should create value for the customer. In line with this perspective, Yuan et al. (2022) explained that customer perceived value significantly determines the consumption and usage decision process of the customer because consumer behaviour is value driven. As metaverse is a recent technological innovation providing a virtual experience, we formulate a hypothesis on three distinct values, specifically utilitarian, hedonic, and social values, which we propose as potential motivators for customers to engage with the metaverse. This statement aligns with the UGT, which provides an explanation for individuals' participation in diverse media-related activities. The UGT posits that humans adopt an active role when consuming media, driven by their own social and psychological needs and motivations (hedonic, utilitarian, and social) (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022). Given these motivations, users could frequently perceive the hedonic, utilitarian, and social value of metaverse.

Hedonic Value and Metaverse

The hedonic value associated with the adoption of new technology is predominantly defined by its experiential and affective dimensions. This aspect of value revolves around the emotional experiences of customers, encompassing sensations of pleasure, satisfaction, playfulness, and enjoyment (Miao et al., 2014). In the context of the metaverse, when individuals engage with it, they can derive hedonic gratification from the entertainment it offers. This includes enjoying virtual experiences like virtual flights to exotic destinations, exploring virtual tourist spots, staying in virtual hotels, and simply using the metaverse as a means to pass time. Moreover, consumers that possess aspirations of escapism are commonly driven to utilize the metaverse as a means to detach themselves from the tangible realm and immerse themselves in a virtual environment, assuming the identities of avatars in order to get pleasure, involve, engage in and immerse with the various virtual hospitality and tourism activities. Extant research on completely simulated virtual worlds has already confirmed the importance of hedonic aspects in certain technologies associated with the metaverse. For instance, Lee and Kim (2021) highlighted the significance of hedonic values as key determinants for the acceptance of VR Tourism. Similarly, Shin and Jeong (2021) found that hedonic values significantly influenced travelers' attitudes toward the use of AR applications. Building upon this foundation, our present study posits that individuals engage with the metaverse for three primary hedonic consumption purposes: entertainment, escapism, and passing time. This assertion draws on well-established hedonic motivations concepts (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, previous research has consistently provided evidence that these factors play a pivotal role in shaping hedonic value in various metaverse-related technologies (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022; Sung, 2021; Ying et al., 2022). Thus, we proposed that the metaverse has the potential to provide hedonic value to the customer.

Utilitarian Value and Metaverse

Utilitarian value pertains to task-specific technology, characterized by the evaluation of the functional benefits obtained from using the technology (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001). It encompasses cognitive aspects of consumer attitudes, such as effectiveness, efficiency, convenience, and task-related helpfulness, as well as economic value for money. Notably, the adoption and utilization of the metaverse have been widely recognized as being driven by the significant motive of utilitarian value in the tourism and hospitality industry (Jo, 2023). The metaverse's utilitarian values for a user are functional and practical characteristic in nature that help to accomplish practical goals/tasks such

as buying hospitality and tourism products, information about a destination and virtually participating in hospitality and tourism activities (Dwivedi et al., 2022). This study posits that individuals engage in the utilization of the metaverse within the domains of hospitality and tourism for six utilitarian consumptions, viz; convenient, useful, efficient, informative, effective, and secure. These important features have been recognised in various previous studies as the utility factors that motivate the users in adopting and utilizing new technologies (Davis, 1989; Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022). The Metaverse offers convenience, allowing users to access it anytime and anywhere for hospitality and tourism planning, experiences, and booking. It has potential to provide a detailed and high-quality information of tourism products, enabling users to compare and analyse various offerings, ultimately saving both time and money. As a result, the Metaverse proves to be efficient, producing effective outcomes. For instance, the customer can utilize the metaverse to book and explore tourism services while sitting at home based on the rich information provided by the metaverse, which will save the customer time and money. Furthermore, the metaverse ensures security through its integration with blockchain technology. It enables smooth economic operations in the metaverse by connecting the user to a broader crypto economy, which allows the exchange of virtual worlds in real world currency. It ensures the data privacy and security of the tourists' by authentication, consensus, and access control mechanisms. For instance, in a metaverse operating on blockchain technology, virtual transaction verification can occur without revealing the user's true identity, such as virtual vacations (Ioannidis & Kontis, 2023). Thus, we propose that the metaverse has the potential to deliver utilitarian value to the customer.

Social Value and Metaverse

Metaverse is often considered the next evolution in social interaction. A crucial aspect of this evolution is the social outcomes that emerge from collective interactions among users, which include activities like co-creation, collaboration, and sharing. These social interactions have been identified as pivotal when utilizing the metaverse (Marr, 2022). Tourist can interact and establish connection with other tourist virtually during the process of using metaverse in the form of Avatars. Moreover, they can share their experience to the closed groups in metaverse. Schöbel and Tingelhoff (2023, p. 11) highlights that "the metaverse can change how we virtually socialize and, thus, can contribute social value". Hence, it can be posited that the metaverse possesses the capacity to fundamentally transform virtual socialization, thereby yielding social value. We introduce three distinct categories of social values: social interaction, social presence and social identity. Here, the platform being discussed provides a highly engaging form of social media that facilitates real-

time interactions among tourists within a shared virtual environment. Users assume virtual identities called avatars and convene with others in digital environments. This novel approach to online interactions introduces a unique sense of physical presence. When compared to other technology-mediated communication methods, the metaverse offers a notably heightened level of social presence (Voinea et al., 2022). It is often defined as the “sense of being with another” (Biocca et al., 2003, p. 1) and has been recognized as a crucial construct within extended reality (XR) and VR environments that significantly influences customers’ attitudes and intentions (Ying et al., 2022). Communication and interaction among tourists in the metaverse can create a sense of presence that closely aligns with human cognition and is akin to real-world interactions. The fundamental theory here is that within the metaverse, tourists must first establish a subjective perception of their avatars’ existence. Subsequently, by engaging with other avatars, they develop a shared feeling of coexistence with fellow users, thereby promoting an elevated level of social presence within the digital realm. Thus, we propose that the metaverse has the potential to deliver social value to the customer.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND METAVERSE

Given that the core objective of the Metaverse is to enhance and augment the real experiences of travellers, it is more logical to frame this concept from a consumer experience perspective rather than a technology-focused one. This approach places the emphasis on the traveller’s experience and satisfaction, making it the primary consideration (Giang Barrera & Shah, 2023; Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022). By providing user with an immersive experience about the hospitality and tourism products prior to the actual

experience, it can empower the tourist in better planning and preparing their trips in an organised manner. The integration of digital sensory stimuli into virtual encounters has the potential to enrich the overall quality and value of hospitality and tourism products by offering tangible cues that represent the intangible aspects of these offerings (Leung et al., 2023). However, capturing the customer experience proves to be a challenging endeavour. Numerous authors have proposed multiple interpretations of experience, leading to various conceptualizations and measurements (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Bleier et al.’s (2019) posits that the online customer experience encompasses cognitive, affective, sensory, and social elements. Given the metaverse’s potential to revolutionize the digital customer experience through advanced interaction, personalized attributes, and immersive elements, we have explained four dimensions of metaverse experience in Fig. 1 (cognitive, affective, sensory, and social dimensions) (Brakus et al., 2009). These proposed dimensions of experience aligns with the four fundamental systems—cognition, affect, relationships, and sensations—that are commonly found in sociology and psychology disciplines (Bleier et al., 2019). Thus, we defined metaverse experience as *a comprehensive amalgamation of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social reactions evoked by various stimuli when a customer engages with the metaverse platform in the pre-, during-, and post-phases of the consuming process, spanning a range from negative to positive responses*. This comprehensive yet parsimonious definition holistically resides in three aspect: 1) it acknowledges the multidimensional nature of metaverse experience: cognitive, affective, sensorial, and social; 2) it acknowledges the metaverse experience in the customer journey; 3) it acknowledges metaverse cognitive, affective, sensorial, and social experience on a spectrum of negative to positive.

Metaverse experience	Cognitive	The degree to which users perceive flow experiences in the metaverse is characterised by their mental immersion and obliviousness to the passage of time or other stimuli.
	Affective	The degree to which interaction with the metaverse influences users’ mood, feelings, attitudes, and emotions.
	Sensory	The degree to which the metaverse will effectively stimulate all five senses in order to provide a multisensory virtual experience to users.
	Social	The degree to which the metaverse will facilitate social interaction where users can interact, collaborate, communicate, and share information with other users.

Fig. 1: Metaverse Tourism Experience

Metaverse Cognitive Experience

The cognitive dimension of the online experience holds significant importance as it plays a pivotal role in shaping customers' attitudes, satisfaction levels, and purchase intentions (Rose et al., 2011, 2012). It is defined as being "connected with thinking or conscious mental processes" (Rose et al., 2012, p. 312). Flow experience is defined as a cognitive state that occurs in digitally mediated situations within the management and tourism disciplines (Novak et al., 2000; W.-Y. Wu et al., 2017). The concept of flow was introduced by Csikszentmihalyi is the process of optimal experience that individuals perceive when they engage in activities with complete immersion. It has wider applicability and underlies many crucial components of the virtual experience for understanding the consumer behaviour (Huang et al., 2020). Emerging virtual environments and immersive platforms such as metaverse are seen as the precursors to a novel online experience with the capacity to fundamentally transform interactions between tourists and organizations within the digital domain (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Hospitality and tourism stakeholders have acknowledged the potential of metaverse for socialisation, entertainment, marketing, and transactions by seamlessly merging the physical and digital realms into a unified immersive encounter due to its attributes of immersiveness, social presence, interoperability and social networking features (Leung et al., 2023; Hadi et al., 2023). These features of the metaverse create a deep sense of involvement, loss of self-consciousness, self-reinforcing and absorption among tourists when using it. For instance, using VR and AR technologies, a tourist can enjoy the virtual tour of hotels and destinations in the metaverse, which leads them to feel a cognitive state of complete enjoyment, absorption, involvement, and time distortion, thereby making them unaware of the activities happening around them. This state is known as the "flow experience" and defines the cognitive aspects of the customer experience (Gao & Bai, 2014; Yang et al., 2022). The extensive level of immersion offered by the metaverse platform through the utilization of AR and VR technologies, along with compatible devices, enables travellers to effortlessly engage with the virtual environment and interact with fellow travellers in the virtual space using avatars and holographic representations. This immersive experience can give rise to cognitive experiential state of the traveller in the metaverse platform. Thus, we propose that the flow experience in the metaverse aligns with the cognitive experience. This proposition is supported by various studies (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023) which have recognized that the metaverse fosters a flow experience.

Metaverse Affective Experience

The affective experience "involves one's affective system through the generation of moods, feelings and emotions" (Rose et al., 2012, p. 312). Therefore, affective experience might be considered as a set of mental processes rather than a particular psychological process. Akin to the traditional online environment, virtual interaction, and engagement in the metaverse also evokes affective experience. Leveraging the power of AR and VR, metaverse can create novel customer experience that will affect the emotional state of the consumer. McStay (2023, p. 11) states that "metaverse-related technologies encompass a heightened emotional sense of being present in an artificial environment, a distinct feeling of detachment from the real world, a sense of belonging within the synthetic reality, the impression of expansion, realism within the virtual world, assessments of size, responses to physical movements, tactile responses, and the experience of coexisting and interacting with others". Affective experience plays a vital role in understanding virtual tourist experience (Hu et al., 2021). Given the pleasure-driven and experiential focus of the hospitality and tourism sector, an increasing body of research has acknowledged the significance of emotional experiences in virtual technologies and how they influence consumer behaviour (Hu et al., 2021). For instance, Stangl et al. (2020) highlight the importance of affective experience in AR applications and its influence on the intention of the user. Similarly, Flavián et al. (2021) highlight the role of VR in creating affective experience and its impact on psychological and behavioural engagement of the user. Moreover, Jiang et al. (2023) found that AR and VR technological features (vividness, interactivity, and immersion) enhances travellers affecting the dimension of experience. We thus propose that metaverse experience can influence the affective state of the traveller throughout the journey.

Metaverse Sensory Experience

Over the past few years, scholars have shown an increasing curiosity in discerning how sensory experiences impact a user's perception, judgment, and behaviour. Consequently, the term "*sensory marketing*" was introduced (Alyahya & McLean, 2022). The sensory component of the experience encompasses several elements that elicit visual (sight), auditory (sound), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), or haptic sensations (touch). Literature provides evidence that sensory dimensions play a pivotal role in shaping consumer experiences in the virtual tourism environment (Mehraliyev et al., 2020). In the current metaverse environment, the scope of the sensory tourism experience is limited to audio and visual sensations only because those are easy to create

(Gursoy et al., 2022). For example, by utilizing HMD like the Meta Quest Pro, customer can achieve a profound level of immersion in the virtual reality experience, such as taking a virtual tour of a destination, exploring a theme park, visiting a museum, or experiencing a hotel environment. These devices fit close to the face having speakers/headphones to provide both auditory and visual sensory experience to the tourist. Researchers have questioned the potential of metaverse to provide olfactory, gustatory and haptic sensorial experience (Gursoy et al., 2022). Nonetheless, it is anticipated that as the metaverse continues to develop, users will be able to engage not only through their sight and sound but also their other senses with the use of multisensory devices built on AR and VR technology (Hu et al., 2021). Technology is being developed to provide sensory experiences beyond visual and auditory input; experts anticipate their availability to the public in the near future. For instance, haptic gloves, based on haptic technology, will enable the sense of touch. Several companies, including Meta, are actively working on this technology. These gloves employ actuators, specifically pads that generate pressure on the user's hand, to create a sensation of touch. Over the reality technology is set to bring the sense of smell using "scentware" cartridges with their VR headset. Additionally, taste is not far behind. An innovative technology known as "Taste the TV" allows users to simulate food flavours by licking a hygienic film on the TV screen. This method utilizes ten flavour canisters to dispense various combinations over the surface, replicating a range of culinary items (Duggal, 2022). In the future, these sensory technologies have the potential to enable tourists to experience not just the aromas and flavours of cuisine, but also to virtually taste the cuisine. In light of these developments, we propose that the metaverse will engage all of our senses to provide a multisensory virtual experience.

Metaverse Social Experience

Social experience encompasses a variety of activities and occasions that enable individuals to participate in social interactions. This includes engaging with others, sharing information, offering social support, exchanging ideas, conducting business, and participating in discussions (Ponsignon & Derbaix, 2020). The metaverse is expected to provide a significant social experience to tourist as its fundamental essence lies in functioning as a social environment, facilitating the convergence of individuals from diverse geographical locations. This platform offers a unique opportunity to form social groups, nurture relationships, and share personal narratives among tourists in ways that transcend geographical limitations (Lin et al., 2023). This occurs through the social presence of travellers, a crucial feature of the metaverse. Particularly, the immersive technologies employed in the metaverse are explicitly crafted to enable and enrich social interaction,

thereby meeting the users' social needs (Oh et al., 2023). Moreover, inside the metaverse, communication facilitated by avatars has the capacity to simultaneously convey a multitude of communication signals, including but not limited to appearance, gesture, and behaviour. The sense of social presence in the metaverse is shaped by the feeling of coexisting with others and the encounter of communication rich in cues, causing travellers to believe that fellow travellers are physically located in the same shared space (Tsai, 2022). The aforementioned social illusion serves to foster social interaction among traveller, as it stimulates individuals' drive to maintain a good image and get social validation from their peers. The role of metaverse in magnifying the social connection among the travellers, other travellers and the hospitality and tourism suppliers facilitates collaborations which encourages metaverse co-creation. In metaverse, users have the capability to interact and engage with other users in a simulated face-to-face environment through the utilization of technological devices like AR/VR headsets (Buhalis, Leung, et al., 2023). Drawing from the earlier conversation, we suggest that the metaverse holds the potential to profoundly alter the nature of social experiences.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Building on the earlier proposition, this conceptual paper introduces the "Value-Experience-Intention Model" (see Fig. 2). The model aims to provide insights into tourists' behavioural intentions to use the metaverse. This model considers three significant elements of marketing within the hospitality and tourism industry: perceived value, customer experience and behavioural intention. This proposed model draws from the widely utilized SOR framework and the UGT to understand customer behavioural intentions (Jin et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). The utilization of the SOR framework in metaverse research is also supported by prior studies (Zhang & Wang, 2023). According to the SOR model, customers evaluate the attributes of the external environment (stimuli), which trigger consumers' emotional and mental states (organism). Based on this internal evaluation, customers then select and display the most suitable behavioural response (response). In this study, perceived value, based on utilitarian, hedonic, and social value, is conceptualized as the stimulus that satisfies utilitarian, hedonic, and social gratifications (Peng & Kim, 2014). Recently, a phenomenological perspective has been adopted by defining customer perceived values as inherently experiential in nature. We define customer perceived values as the motivational forces that drive the customer experience. These motivational forces are based on user gratifications and act as stimulating factors for the customer experience in the metaverse (Peng & Kim, 2014). This proposition is supported by studies (Peng & Kim, 2014; Wu & Huang, 2023) which considered perceived value as the

stimulus factor in the online context. The multidimensional experience of the metaverse, considering cognitive, affective, sensory, and social dimensions, is conceptualized as the organism in accordance with Barbu et al. (2021), while behavioural intention is considered as the response. The organism refers to the internal process and structure between the stimulus and responses, including cognitive, affective, social, and sensory conditions triggered by the stimuli. This process generates the metaverse experience, which is formed by the customers' subjective evaluation of various

benefits. Therefore, we considered customer experience as the organism. The response is the outcome of the metaverse experience which is the behavioural intention. Since the metaverse is an online virtual platform, trust in the accuracy and truthfulness of the metaverse platform is imperative. Therefore, we have included a moderation analysis of trust (Bleier et al., 2019). This is in congruence with the previous literature, which argues trust act as a moderator between customer experiences and behavioural intention in the context of online purchase (Gefen et al., 2008).

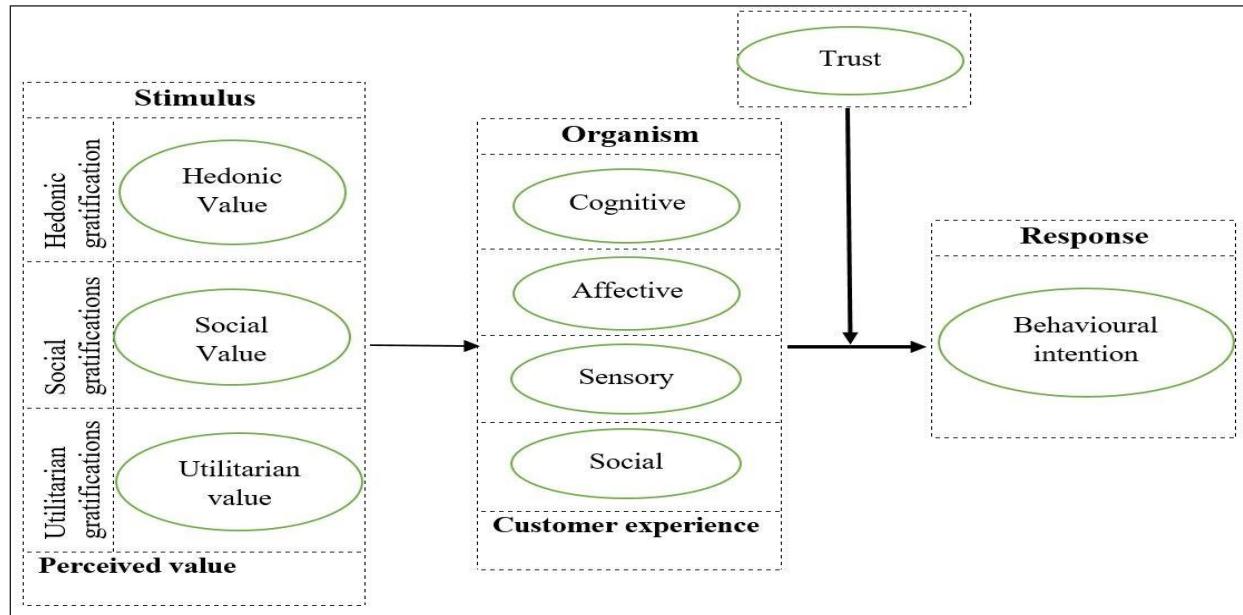


Fig. 2: Conceptual Model

IMPLICATIONS

This conceptual paper accentuates three contributions. First, we emphasised that hedonic, utilitarian, and social values based on the UGT will motivate the customer to use the metaverse. Numerous studies in the literature demonstrate that these values influence the adoption and continued behaviour of the customer in the acceptance of traditional IT systems (Davis, 1989; Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022). However, this study extends the relevance of these established perceived values to the unexplored metaverse territory, particularly relating to the virtual hospitality experience. We highlight utilitarian (useful-driven), hedonic (pleasure-driven), and social (interaction-driven) values that significantly influence the decision of the user to engage with the metaverse. This novel perspective could serve as the basis for further investigations to understand these influencing factors. Second, and salient, the present study contributes to customer experience research by demonstrating various dimensions of the metaverse tourism experience. As a result, given the infancy stage of the metaverse, the study not only addresses the multidimensional nature of customer experience but also

adds to the recent theorization of metaverse customer experience in tourism research. Until now, studies on metaverse research have focused on immersive hospitality and tourism experiences. Nevertheless, all this research considers customer experience as a singular concept and fails to shed light on the different types of customer experiences in the metaverse. On the other hand, we argued that metaverse experiences are multidimensional and consist of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social aspects. Thus, this study separates itself from past research and opens up new avenues for academic research in metaverse-enabled tourist experiences. Third, by proposing a theoretical model, our study provides a framework for understanding the behavioural intention of the customer to engage with the metaverse. This may assist hospitality and tourism scholars in becoming aware of the factors that influence the inclination to use the metaverse.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The majority of the current literature on the metaverse predominantly involves conceptual discussions and relies on

a speculative approach to predict the potential influence of the metaverse on the tourism and hospitality sector (Gursoy et al., 2022). Numerous questions remain unanswered, which require a deeper understanding to thoroughly grasp the potential opportunities and challenges that the metaverse presents for the tourism and hospitality industry. For instance, the metaverse is not a single technology but rather a technical concept formed by the integration of various technologies. Furthermore, virtual interaction through the metaverse has the potential to augment and even replace physical interaction (Buhalis et al., 2023). Therefore, the metaverse can have substantial negative consequences for customers compared to other technologies. However, the question of what the negative consequences of the metaverse are for the customers of the tourism and hospitality industries has not yet been explored comprehensively. The growing body of literature seems to envision the “bright side of the metaverse” from a positive and utopian perspective, perhaps ignoring the negative and dystopian side of the metaverse for the customer, emphasising a need for a holistic understanding of the dark side of the metaverse. The negative consequences, such as meta-exploitation, unethical behaviour, and privacy issues, might affect the metaverse experience and behavioural intention of the customer in the hospitality and tourism context. Furthermore, there is a lack of defined legal protection and regulation regarding the use of the metaverse in hospitality and tourism settings. In the absence of regulation, the impact and implications of the metaverse on tourists could be horrendous. Therefore, research can address this aspect for the development of a responsible and sustainable metaverse. Additionally, the metaverse can be a servicescape for virtual tourism. In the metaverse, physical tourism products, experiences, and events could be converted into digital. Consequently, the metaverse will enable an unlimited number of tourists to participate in virtual tourism, which will lead tourism businesses to increase revenue streams. Hence, future research can delve into the metaverse servicescape and how it affects the internal state and behaviour of customers. Finally, the proposed theoretical model can be tested empirically in future research for generalisation to understand the relationship between perceived value, and metaverse experience and their impact on behavioural intention of the customer.

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