

Effect of dimensions of customer experience on revisit intention of Malaysian Escape Room players

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ABSTRACT: Escape rooms have seen a surge of growth prior to the sudden abrupt halt brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This business model now faces the need to evolve and adapt to survive in this trying economic climate by addressing the issue of how to secure a stable customer base. This research went about addressing that question through a sequential exploratory mixed method design to find out the effect of the dimensions of customer experience on revisit intention. The proposed conceptual model which leans on the theory of goal directed behaviour and flow theory of experience demonstrated that 10 of the 11 hypotheses drawn were significant at the 95% confidence level.

Keywords: *escape room; customer experience, model of goal directed behavior; repurchase intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

Escape Room is a team-based game where players are locked inside a room and required to escape within a given duration by completing a series of tasks [1]. From its humble beginnings in Japan, the Escape Room grew into a global phenomenon with an estimated 8,000 establishments in operation worldwide [2]. The Escape Room has proven to be a lucrative business, clocking in a six-figure income every month and a fifty percent profit average in the first two years of operations [3].

Notwithstanding the Escape Room's attractive value proposition, the industry faces cut-throat competition arising from its unique attributes. Unlike conventional games, the Escape Room inherent value depreciates greatly with each play. Most operators found it challenging to retain their customer base as often do not return after the players have completed the room [4]. This predicament has not been addressed in past studies on Escape Room, which mainly focus on the conceptualisation of customer experience in Western-based establishments [5, 6]. Research on Malaysian Escape Rooms are non-existence despite housing the second largest number of Escape Rooms in Southeast Asia [7], thus motivating us to pursue this research.

As such, the research aims to examine the structural effect between the dimensions of customer experience (CE) and revisit intention (RI) of Malaysian Escape Room players.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is divided into a qualitative phase and a quantitative phase. The qualitative phase involved a

series of structured interviews, the results of which have been reported in a previous publication [7]. The dimensions of CE of Malaysian Escape Room players was developed based on themes extracted from thematic analysis of inputs collected from interviews with Malaysian Escape Room players [7] and was further supported by an extensive review of CE and RI published from 1998 to 2019. A pre-test and pilot study were carried out to enhance the measurement instruments. Out of 14 CE dimensions identified, two dimensions were omitted (relational experience and knowledge) due to high cross-loadings. Relational experience cross loaded on involvement due to the similar vein of thought holding both constructs together. Knowledge also cross loaded on skill although to a lesser extent resulting in these two constructs being dropped from the study. The remaining 12 dimensions were measured using a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Data were collected using a 70-items questionnaire. The population of the study were Malaysian Escape Room players. A criterion sampling procedure was used whereby the single criterion used was that respondents had to have participated at least once in an escape room. Due to restrictions from several Escape Room owners, participants of the study primarily comprised of those leaving the premises of Breakout Nu Sentral, Breakout Avenue K, Escape Room eCurve and Escape Room @Berjaya Times Square. The survey data collected was then analysed using the Smart PLS 3 software to assess the validity of the data collected and establish the relationships between the dimensions in the structural model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 500 of questionnaires were distributed at four Escape Room establishments in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Out of 351 responses received, only 339 are useable making the response rate 67.8 per cent. In terms of demographics, the respondents mostly fell in the 21-30 age group (38.6%) and 20 years and under (34.2%). In terms of gender, both genders were approximately equally represented (49.6% male, 50.4% female). In terms of income, 41.9% of respondents reported earning less than RM1000 which is likely due to the preponderance of respondents aged 20 years and under who likely do not have a source of income. While the second largest group making up 20.6% of respondents had an income of RM3001-RM5000. A vast majority of respondents (81.1%) had only visited one establishment,

and were also first time players, highlighting once again the common problem faced by the escape room industry. The qualitative data from the previous study resulted in 14 constructs that were then further reduced to 12 after the pilot study. The structural model illustrating the relationships between the dimensions and revisit intention are presented in Figure 1.

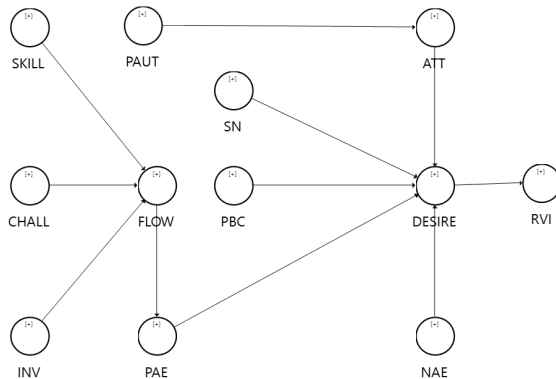


Figure 1: relationship between dimensions of customer experience and revisit intention

Of the 11 hypotheses tested, 10 were significant with the only hypotheses being insignificantly correlated at a 95% confidence interval being perceived behavioural control and desire. Table 1 shows the assessment of the structural model using PLS bootstrapping.

Table 1: Relationship among Latent Variables

H		Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	S/NS
1	ATT > DESIRE	0.277	0.067	4.144	0.000	S
2	SN > DESIRE	0.158	0.029	5.399	0.000	S
3	PBC > DESIRE	0.026	0.027	0.937	0.175	NS
4	PAE > DESIRE	0.506	0.053	9.520	0.000	S
5	NAE > DESIRE	0.057	0.032	1.815	0.035	S
6	PAUT > ATT	0.839	0.012	71.21	0.000	S
7	SKILL > FLOW	0.521	0.043	12.11	0.000	S
8	CHAL > FLOW	0.256	0.037	7.025	0.000	S
9	INV > FLOW	0.282	0.043	6.629	0.000	S
10	FLOW > PAE	0.490	0.040	12.17	0.000	S
11	DESIRE -> RVI	0.707	0.027	26.45	0.000	S

4. CONCLUSION

The data highlights a few important findings that serve as a guide for how escape room operators could improve the efficiency of their room use and increase revisit intention of customers especially those attempting an escape room for the first time. Given that the loading of positive anticipated emotion (PAE) on

desire was the highest, it stands to reason that making customers feel excited and pumped about playing the game while also assuaging their anxiety about not performing well or having an experience that ends up being a waste of time and money is crucial to ensuring that both new as well as repeating customers are keen on attempting if not the same room at least another room in the establishment. Because flow is highly correlated with PAE, and is highly influenced by its antecedents skill, challenge and involvement – this becomes another crucial aspect of the game whereby operators have to match groups with appropriate level of challenge as well as activities that will keep all the members optimally involved, as opposed to a challenge for one or a few of the members whereas the others are left with nothing much to do. The authenticity of the room in terms of design, theme and layout also has a profound effect on the players’ attitude towards the game whereby a more authentic layout would result in more enthused players who are more willing to participate and therefore more invested in escaping the room.

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