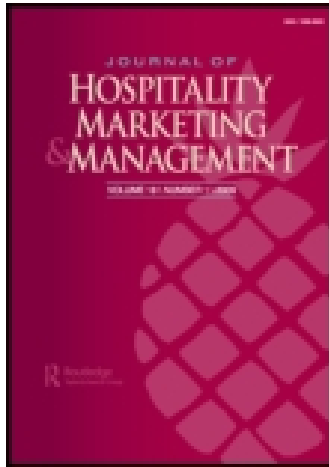


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### Linking Service Quality at the Cellar Door with Brand Equity Building

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## **Linking Service Quality at the Cellar Door with Brand Equity Building**

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*The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the cellar door experience on the postvisit behavior of wine tourists with respect to winery brands. The underlying premise is that positive winery experiences can influence brand equity building, which in turn can be translated into positive behavioral intentions. A sample of 349 winery visitors and structural equation modeling analysis are used to test the proposed conceptual model, which incorporates three temporal dimensions of the winery experience (i.e., previsit, on-site, and postvisit). The main findings confirm that service quality at the cellar door has a strong positive impact on visitor satisfaction, which is a positive antecedent of consumer based brand equity. Satisfaction has both direct and indirect effects on future behavioral intentions and brand extensibility. The findings confirm the existence of a service quality/satisfaction/consumer-based brand equity/behavioral intentions/brand extensibility chain of causality.*

**KEYWORDS** *winery experience, service quality, brand equity*

### INTRODUCTION

The winery or “cellar door” visit, which can be regarded as a form of consumer experience tourism (CET), is usually the core service offered in the context of wine tourism (R. D. Mitchell, 2004; Christou & Nella, 2010a). The relationship between winery visitation, brand loyalty, and other positive

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effects on postvisit consumer behavior has drawn the attention of many researchers (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2000; R. Mitchell & Hall, 2004; Nowak, Thach, & Olsen, 2006; Olsen & Thach, 2006; O'Neill & Charters, 2006; Gill, Byslma, & Ouschan, 2007; Orth, Limon, & Rose, 2010; Christou, 2011a). The aim of this study is to explore relationships between various perceptual constructs of consumer behavior, such as previsit attitudes towards the winery and its brands, perceived service quality of the winery experience, visitor satisfaction, customer-based brand equity (CBBE), and behavioral intentions. The study took place in Greece and focuses on the impact of the winery experience on the brand level. With the use of multi-item measurement scales and structural equation modelling (SEM), we investigate whether a satisfactory winery experience, which derives from high service quality at the cellar door, can create positive brand effects, such as CBBE, positive attitudes towards brand extensibility practices and positive behavioral intentions. The research objectives are to:

- relate service quality at the cellar door to satisfaction from the winery experience, with the ultimate goal of investigating the impact of the latter on CBBE and positive behavioral intentions, such as revisit intention and positive word of mouth creation;
- consider the role of previsit consumer attitudes towards the winery and its brands, with respect to postvisit CBBE;
- evaluate whether the positive impact of the winery experience on CBBE can be converted into increased potential for the company in terms of brand extension; and
- incorporate all of these constructs into a conceptual relationship model.

Apart from attempting to support empirically the existence of relationships among the aforementioned theoretical constructs, this study is the first to explore them systematically at the national level.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is divided in three parts: the first provides an introduction in CET, wine tourism and the winery experience, the second presents a literature review of the effects of the winery experience on postvisit consumer behavior, while the third provides a brief introduction to CBBE, which is one of the main constructs in the current study.

### Consumer Experience Tourism, Wine Tourism, and the Winery Experience

CET is also known as manufacturing tourism or industrial tourism and it initially evolved in the context of relationship marketing, as a marketing tool

for strengthening interpersonal bonds and increasing visitors' knowledge of company brands (M. A. Mitchell & S. J. Mitchell, 2001a). The use of CET practices is not new; visitor tours of Scottish malt whiskey distilleries have been taking place since the 1960s (McBoyle & McBoyle, 2008). However, the main point of examining CET is to consider the consumer relationship with the brand or the organization, and not simply the tourism experience (M. A. Mitchell & S. J. Mitchell, 2001b). It could be supported that CET has received limited attention in the marketing literature; although it has often been included briefly in discussions of integrated communication, it has not yet received direct and systematic research attention (M. A. Mitchell & Orwig, 2002; Chatzigeorgiou, Christou, Kassianidis, & Sigala, 2009).

Wine tourism, on the other hand, can be examined through at least three fundamental perspectives (i.e., a form of consumer behavior, a marketing opportunity for wineries to educate and sell their products directly to consumers, and a strategy for developing destinations), as well as marketing wine-related attractions and conveying appealing imagery (Getz, 2000). There are a number of ways in which the wine tourism experience can be provided, such as wine events and festivals, cultural heritage, dining, hospitality, education, tasting, cellar door sales, and winery tours (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). R. D. Mitchell (2004) distinguishes additionally between broader wine tourism and winery visitation, with the latter being perhaps the most important of the different elements of the wine tourism experience.

In the same vein, the importance of the winery experience is being constantly acknowledged, as the behavior of a winery visitor is likely to be influenced not only by product samples, but also by the wider ambience and the experience provided (O'Neill, Palmer, & Charters, 2002; Corkingdale & Welsh, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Fountain, Fish, & Charters, 2008; Christou, 2010). Thus, the traditional winery experience, which is limited to wine tasting and a quick visit to the production facilities, can be augmented in many ways (Jaffe & Pasternak, 2004).

In this manner, Getz (2000) proposed alternative options for enriching the winery experience by presenting the winery in different ways, such as a museum, an art gallery and a monument to taste and sophistication, a fun-filled event venue or as a wine-estate destination. Either in its core or augmented form, the winery experience represents the common ground of wine tourism and CET. While examining CET in the context of wine tourism, we focus on the first two perspectives that Getz (2000) proposed (i.e., a form of consumer behavior and a marketing opportunity for wineries). As R. Mitchell and Hall (2004, p. 38) noted, "Visitors may gain several of the elements of CET by simply visiting a winery and vineyard."

### The Winery Experience and Its Effects on Postvisit Consumer Behavior

The significance of customer satisfaction and its impact on postconsumption reactions and business performance is a widely discussed issue. Concerning

the winery experience, the importance of visitor satisfaction has been emphasized, in addition to the quality of the wine product for gaining flow-on benefits (O'Neill & Charters, 2000; Jago & Issaverdis, 2001). In many cases, winery visitors tend to base decisions about buying wine on service quality and satisfaction, rather than wine quality (O'Neill et al., 2002; Corkingdale & Welsh, 2003). According to another view, high levels of satisfaction have been linked to increased levels of gratitude and thus higher spending (Kolyesnikova & Dodd, 2008; Christou, 2011b).

Although a number of authors have postulated that the cellar door experience is important for the development of postvisit loyalty and other positive consumer reactions, limited research has been conducted on the process by which brand loyalty is established during the tasting room encounter, or the perceptions and expectations of winery visitors (O'Neill & Charters, 2006). As for the effects of the cellar door experience on consumer behavior, a review of the relevant literature reveals that it provides significant opportunities to (a) build brand awareness, (b) enhance brand attachment, and (c) create loyalty and commitment.

Brand awareness can be enhanced through winery visits, since wine tourists can taste the wine before purchasing and listen to the "brand story" (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997). Alonso, Sheridan, and Scherrer (2008) consider the winery experience a valuable tool for educating and even "converting" visitors into enthusiastic "brand ambassadors" who create positive word of mouth. It is worth noting that word of mouth is one of the most important information sources for winery visitors (Dodd, 1995, 1999) and tourists in general (Dodds & Butler, 2010).

Given the diminishing consumer awareness of wine brands and the fact that brand repertoires are usually larger than many other consumer good categories (Lockshin, Rasmussen, & Cleary, 2000; Horrigan, 2009), the need to establish ongoing interpersonal relationships with winery visitors through a well-defined strategy seems compelling (O'Neill et al., 2002; R. Mitchell, 2006). A winery visit is an excellent opportunity to create something more than awareness, namely familiarity with the winery and its brands (O'Mahony, Hall, Lockshin, Jago, & Brown, 2006). The first visit to a winery may constitute the beginning of a relationship, since the opportunity to learn more about a brand can create significant associations with it. The tasting room experience has also been linked to the affective attachments a visitor develops for a particular producer, which, by extension, can impact on their subsequent brand loyalty (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Bruwer, 2002; R. D. Mitchell, 2006; O'Neill & Charters, 2006). Orth et al. (2010) supported the notion that a positive affective experience evoked during a store visit can facilitate attachment to a focal brand, particularly in a single brand environment. Olsen and Thach (2006) investigated the relationship between brand attachment and selected service quality variables in the winery setting and found that the most important factors were visitor education, brand differentiation, and customer service.

A number of researchers have attempted to link wine tourism with various aspects of brand loyalty, such as on-site and postvisit wine purchases, repeat visitation, and the creation of positive word-of-mouth (e.g., R. Mitchell & Hall, 2004; R. Mitchell, 2006). Positive and memorable tasting room experiences, that create lasting emotional ties between visitors and the brand, can foster brand loyalty and commitment (Nowak & Newton, 2006; O'Mahony et al., 2006; Fountain et al., 2008). Satisfaction from the wine tourism experience was found to have a positive impact on future behavioral intentions in the cases of winery and wine festival visitors (Gill et al., 2007; Yuan, Morrison, Cai, & Linton, 2008). This should ultimately translate into higher sales and revenue.

### Customer-Based Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to the incremental value of a product due to the brand name (Srivastava & Shocker, 1991; Sigala, 2010) or, alternatively, to the incremental utility that a brand endows to a product compared to its non-branded counterpart (Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002; Christou, 2003). According to Aaker (1991), brand equity consists of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. Brand equity may be assessed from three perspectives, namely customer mindset, product market outcomes, and financial market outcomes (Keller & Lehmann, 2001).

Based on the customer perspective, Keller (1993) introduced the first conceptual model of CBBE, which was defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. The process of building a strong brand consists of four steps: (a) establishing the appropriate identity (i.e., breadth and depth of brand awareness), (b) creating the appropriate brand meaning through strong, favorable, and unique brand associations, (c) eliciting positive, accessible brand responses, and (d) forging brand relationships with customers that are characterized by intense, active loyalty (Keller, 2001).

Yoo and Donthu (2001) proposed a multidimensional model and scale relating to CBBE, consisting of three main components: brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness/associations. Other authors (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999; Tolba & Hassan, 2009) argued that consumer-based equity could be defined in terms of cognition (knowledge equity), affect (attitudinal equity), and experience (relationship equity).

As far as wine is concerned, previous research has identified two critical success factors for building wine brand equity: perceived wine quality and consumer perceptions of fair pricing relative to quality (Nowak & Washburn, 2002). At the winery level, brand equity constitutes a combination of factors such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, and attitudes towards the winery and its wine brands (Orth, McGarry-Wolf, &



Dodd, 2005). The role of the winery experience on brand equity building has been explored and acknowledged by Nowak et al. (2006). The cellar door can also help establish or reinforce the image and perceived quality levels of a brand (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001; R. Mitchell & Hall, 2004). Thus, the tasting room can become a marketing and branding vehicle for the wine product, since this experience builds brand image and also impacts directly on the marketing of the wine itself (Alonso et al., 2008). Consequently, wine tourism can become a valuable tool for brand equity building, especially if good results are further enhanced through appropriate customer-relationship management (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001; O'Neill et al., 2002; Kamenidou, Mamalis, & Priporas, 2009).

By accepting that the winery experience is a form of CET, we can assume that a positive experience creates positive effects at the brand level. As shown in the literature review, previous findings on wine tourism have linked this experience with a number of positive cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral aspects. Additionally, CBBE consists of some of these aspects. In this context, the study uses the findings of previous wine tourism studies to support a theoretical connection between the winery experience and CBBE.

## FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES

The tourism experience can be broken down into five stages: anticipation, travel to destination, destination/on-site visit, travel from destination, and reminiscence (Pearce, 1982; Fridgen, 1984). Concerning the wine tourism experience, this is not limited to a particular venue or attraction, since wine can be experienced at a number of locations—before, during and after the on-site visit (R. Mitchell et al., 2000). Consequently, it is appropriate to examine the winery experience within a wider temporal context and take into account previsit differences between winery visitors (Christou & Nella, 2010c; R. Mitchell et al., 2000). However, few theoretical frameworks and empirical studies examine wine tourism experiences within a broader temporal context (i.e., previsit behavior and attitudes, on-site wine experiences, and their effects on postvisit consumer behavior; R. Mitchell & Hall, 2004; Yuan et al., 2008). The present study contributes to broadening this theoretical subfield by providing evidence on the effects of service quality and satisfaction from the winery experience at the brand level (i.e., CBBE and brand extensibility).

The relationship between service quality and satisfaction has been explored in a variety of contexts (e.g., Teas, 1993; Oliver, 1994; Tam, 2000; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Choi & Chu, 2001; Petrick & Backman, 2002). Although an extensive research dialogue refers to the direction of relationship between the two constructs, the prevailing notion is that service quality



is an antecedent of customer satisfaction (e.g., Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996; Caruana, Money, & Berthon, 2000; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ekinci, Dawes, & Massey, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Lympelopoulous & Chaniotakis, 2008; Kim, 2011; Zaibaf, Taherikia, & Fakharian, 2013). Therefore, we adopt this view and test the following hypothesis:

*H1:* Service quality at the cellar door is an antecedent of satisfaction with the winery experience in question.

In the context of hospitality Nam, Ekinci, and Whyatt (2011) supported that five dimensions of brand equity have a positive impact on consumer satisfaction. In the present study, we aim to support a relationship between satisfaction obtained from the winery experience and CBBE with respect to winery brands. In other words, we hypothesize a relationship in opposing directions (an inverse relationship). Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is being considered as a tool contributing to brand equity (Seric & Gil-Saura, 2012). In this view, the winery experience, which is a form of CET and provides ample opportunities to implement an IMC strategy, can build brand equity. As noted in the above literature review, the winery experience can significantly influence: (a) brand awareness and associations (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Alonso et al., 2008), (b) brand loyalty (Nowak & Newton, 2006; Fountain et al., 2008; O' Mahony et al., 2006), and (c) perceived quality and the brand image of wine (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001; R. Mitchell & Hall, 2004). Given that these are three basic aspects of brand equity, it can be deduced that the winery experience influences wine brand equity as well. Moreover, Nowak et al. (2006) found that, for the millennials consumer segment, a positive tasting room experience can build brand equity for the winery and influence postpurchase attitudes. Thus, it is suggested that:

*H2:* The higher the level of satisfaction from the experience, the higher the level of CBBE.

Good store image has been related to higher levels of brand equity (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Within this context, it seems fair to assume that postvisit CBBE is likely to be influenced by the initial (previsit) attitudes of winery visitors towards the winery and its brands, given that CBBE is a measure of the cognitive and behavioral equity of a brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Orth et al. (2005) also note that attitudes towards the winery and its brand(s) influence brand equity. Thus, in the context of the winery experience, we assume that for a given level of satisfaction from the experience, perceived CBBE will be higher when positive previsit attitudes towards the winery and its brands already exist. In other words, we propose that:

*H3:* The more positive the previsit attitudes towards the winery and its brands the higher the level of CBBE for a given level of satisfaction from the winery experience.

Satisfaction from the winery experience can also be expected to have major implications for postvisit behavioral intentions. Direct positive effects between satisfaction and future behavioral intentions have been identified by many researchers (e.g., Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Taylor & Baker, 1994; Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996; Tam, 2000; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; Petrick & Backman, 2002; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009; Chen & Chen, 2010; Mason & Nassivera, 2013). Similar links have been identified in the context of wine tourism (O'Neill et al., 2002; Nowak & Newton, 2006; Gill et al., 2007; Yuan & Yang, 2008). Thus we hypothesize that:

*H4:* The higher the level of satisfaction from the winery experience, the more likely positive behavioral intentions towards the winery and its brands are to emerge.

Satisfaction is also expected to have a positive impact on visitor attitudes towards brand extensibility practices. As positive winery experiences have positive cognitive and emotional effects towards the winery (Nowak et al., 2006) one can expect these effects to extend to a new wine product within the family brand. In simple words, we expect that a visitor with high levels of satisfaction from the winery experience is likely to have more positive attitudes towards a new extension of the winery's brands, in comparison with a less satisfied visitor.

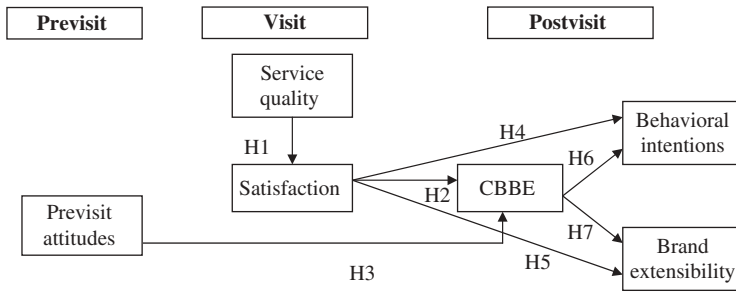
*H5:* The higher the level of satisfaction from the experience, the more positive the attitudes towards brand extensibility practices.

High levels of CBBE translate into more positive consumer reactions towards the marketing mix (Keller, 1993) and other consumer behavior outcomes, such as loyalty (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Consequently, CBBE is expected to have a positive effect on postvisit behavioral intentions. Thus, it is suggested that:

*H6:* CBBE is an antecedent of positive behavioral intentions.

The final hypothesis of the model concerns CBBE and its relationship with brand extensibility. Keller (1998) proposed that higher levels of CBBE might yield more positive attitudes towards brand extensibility practices. Moreover, consumers generally draw on their brand attitudes in order to evaluate a new extension and strong brand equity extensions are more likely to be accepted (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Czellar, 2003). Thus we propose that:

*H7:* CBBE is an antecedent of brand extensibility.



**FIGURE 1** The proposed conceptual model.

The proposed conceptual framework and the associated research hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given that the study was exploratory in the sense of exploring the relationships among the abovementioned constructs, a convenience sample was used. The study aimed to cover three basic phases of the tourism experience (previsit, visit, postvisit) and parallel, to describe the profiles of respondents. Accordingly the questionnaire was divided into four sections: (a) relationship with wine prior to the winery visit (previsit attitudes towards the winery and its brands, past experiences, expectations, visitation motives), (b) evaluation of the current winery experience (service quality, satisfaction), (c) postvisit perceptions and intentions (CBBE, attitudes towards brand extensibility practices, postvisit behavioral intentions), and (d) socio-demographic data (gender, occupation, educational level, age group, monthly income, and expenditure on wine).

Multi-item measurement was applied to previsit attitudes, service quality, satisfaction, CBBE, brand extensibility, and behavioral intentions. In order to ensure content validity, measures adapted from previous studies were chosen for most of the constructs. Apart from respondent information measured with categorical scales (e.g., demographics, motives), all other items were measured either with 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*), or with 7-point semantic differential scales.

More precisely, a comprehensive 14-item scale proposed by Christou and Nella (2010b) was used to measure service quality in the winery setting, while satisfaction was measured with four Likert statements, adapted from the scale proposed by Fisher and Price (1991). The multidimensional 10-item scale proposed and validated by Yoo and Donthu (2001) was used to measure CBBE. Finally, the scale for measuring attitudes towards

brand extensibility practices was adapted from Wang, Wei, and Yu (2008). Previsit attitudes were measured with two items, one referring to attitude towards the winery and another referring to attitudes towards the winery's brand(s). Behavioral intentions were measured with three items (i.e., revisit intention, word-of-mouth creation, and enhancement of category preferences).

The method of self-completion was chosen and respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire immediately after the end of their visit. The measurement covering the three phases of the experience (previsit, on-site, and post visit) was examined simultaneously within a single phase. Although this was chosen in order to reduce the complexity of the surveying process, the authors acknowledge that distinct previsit and postvisit measurements would provide less biased results.

Winery managers were asked to assist in the process of data collection by distributing questionnaires to their visitors. Ultimately, managers from 18 wineries of various characteristics, sizes, and visitation traffic from different wine-producing regions of Greece accepted this invitation. In May 2010, approximately 900 questionnaires were sent to them, after considering their estimations of visitation traffic and their ability to distribute a certain number of questionnaires. The specific time period was selected in order to exploit the increased visitation resulting from an important annual wine event called Open Doors, which takes place at most Greek wineries in mid-May. The data collection procedure lasted until July 2010 and 349 fully usable questionnaires were gathered, yielding a response rate of 38.8%.

## RESULTS

### Sample Description

Men represented 55% of the total sample, and all respondents were Greek. The respondents had a high educational level, with the majority holding university degrees (59%) and another 18% having postgraduate qualifications. Approximately 42% were younger than 34 years old and 34% were above 45 years old. As for their average monthly income, 59% of the respondents had an income of less than 1,300 euros while only 21% had an income exceeding 1,800 euros. Regarding their monthly spending on wine, 29% stated that they spend less than 20 euros, while the majority (40%) claimed that they spend between 20 and 50 euros. The heavy wine spenders (>80 euros per month) represented 12% of the sample.

From the section examining their previsit wine tourism experiences, it emerged that 35% did not have previous winery experiences, while 34% were visiting the winery within a group. The majority of visitors with previous wine tourism experience (82%) claimed to be fairly or very satisfied with previous winery experiences. It is also interesting to note that

approximately 22% of the respondents had visited the specific winery again in the past. Approximately 95% had tasted one or more of the available wines and 70% made on-site wine purchases. Their main motives for visiting a winery were to obtain information about specific wines (76% of the respondents), make wine purchases (72%), perform wine tasting (71%), or experience the atmosphere of a winery (49%).

### SEM Analysis

In order to test the proposed baseline model and the seven research hypotheses, SEM was implemented. The 349 usable questionnaires were considered a sufficient sample for conducting valid and reliable analysis for the specific model. From a data-analysis perspective, a sample of 200 is the minimum required for the use of structural equation modeling techniques (Bollen, 1989). While evaluating the measurement model, it became obvious that certain items with insignificant or low factor loadings should be purged from the model. Specifically, two items were deleted from the service quality measurement scale, one from the satisfaction measurement scale, two from the CBBE scale, and one from the brand extensibility scale. The revised scales, as well as the respective Cronbach's alphas, are shown in Table 1. As the Cronbach's alpha values for the measurement scales range from 0.867 to 0.968, sound construct reliability is established.

The structural model was tested subsequently with AMOS 19.0 software. As the  $\chi^2$  criterion is very sensitive to sample size and thus not always an appropriate criterion for assessing model fit in the cases of large samples (see also Chen & Chen, 2010; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010), the significant chi-square that was produced was in fact ignored. In such cases, the relative chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) provides a better criterion, and was found to equal 2.897 ( $<3$ ), thus within the acceptable limits. Additionally, RMSEA was equal to 0.074 ( $<0.08$ ), thus indicating an acceptable fit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Moreover, all factor loadings were significant at the .001 level and the indices of CFI and IFI further supported for the model's fit with the empirical data, since their values exceeded 0.90 (CFI = 0.919, IFI = 0.920).

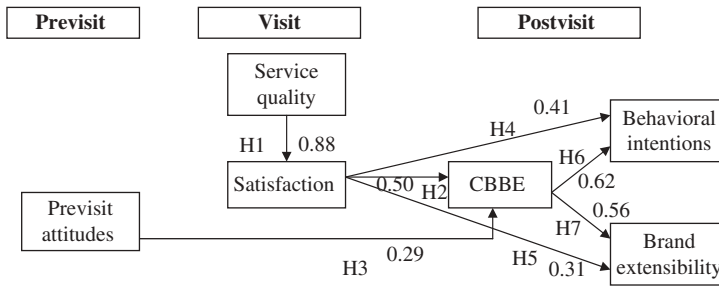
The next step was to examine the strength of relationships among the model's constructs (see Figure 2 for a simplified depiction of SEM results). In SEM analysis, standardized coefficients with higher magnitudes indicate higher levels of strength. Service quality proved to be a very strong positive antecedent of satisfaction (0.88), with the latter being a strong antecedent of CBBE (0.50). Previsit attitude was also an antecedent of CBBE (0.29). Additionally, CBBE had strong direct effects on behavioral intentions and on attitudes towards brand extensibility practices (0.62 and 0.56, respectively). Moreover, satisfaction had both direct and indirect (through CBBE) effects on behavioral intentions (0.41 and 0.31, respectively) and brand extensibility

**TABLE 1** Internal reliability of the final measurement scales

Latent constructs and items	Cronbach' s $\alpha$
Previsit attitudes	0.893
Previsit attitudes towards the winery	
Previsit attitudes towards the winery's brands	
Service quality	0.968
Staff was always willing to help guests	
Broad range of available (for tasting) wines	
High quality of the wine tasted	
Did not have to wait excessively	
Staff understood my specific needs	
Staff gave individualized attention	
Convenient business hours	
Interest in solving customer problems	
The winery got things right first time	
Staff knowledge to answer questions	
Felt secure in dealing with winery	
Staff were consistently courteous	
Satisfaction	0.920
The visit to the winery's cellar door was satisfying.	
The visit was better than expected.	
A visit to this winery was worthwhile.	
Consumer-based brand equity	0.916
The likelihood that this brand would meet my standards is very high.	
The likely quality of the winery's brand is extremely high.	
I can recognize the winery's brand among other competitive brands.	
I am aware of the winery's products.	
The winery's brand would be my first choice.	
Some characteristics of the winery's brand come to my mind quickly.	
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of the winery's brand.	
I have no difficulty in imagining the brand in my mind.	
Behavioral intentions	0.867
I intend to visit again this winery in the future.	
I would encourage family and friends to visit the winery.	
After this winery visit, my preference for wine has been positively influenced.	
Brand extensibility	0.897
An extension by the winery's brand must be popular.	
This brand's extensions must be of higher quality than other brands.	
The quality of this brand's extension will be even better.	

(0.31 and 0.28, respectively). The direct, indirect and total effects are presented in [Table 2](#) while [Table 3](#) presents the standardised regression weights of the measurement items and the respective latent constructs.

Another evaluation criterion for the structural model refers to the squared multiple correlations of the latent constructs. The model seemed to have relatively good predictive power, since it explained high percentages of the variance of the critical variables (i.e., 82% of behavioral intentions, 78% of satisfaction, 60% of brand extensibility, and 34% of CBBE).



**FIGURE 2** SEM results.

*Note.* All of the depicted relationships between constructs were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The  $R^2$  (% of explained variances) were: 0.77 for satisfaction, 0.41 for CBBE, 0.64 for brand extensibility, 0.83 for behavioral intentions.

**TABLE 2** Direct, indirect and total effects of the model

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Previsit Attitudes → CBBE	0.29	—	0.29
Service Quality → Satisfaction	0.88	—	0.88
Satisfaction → CBBE	0.50	—	0.50
CBBE → Behavioral Intentions	0.62	—	0.62
CBBE → Brand Extensibility	0.56	—	0.56
Satisfaction → Behavioral Intentions	0.41	0.31	0.72
Satisfaction → Brand Extensibility	0.31	0.28	0.59

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study examines the effects of the winery experience on postvisit consumer behavior with an emphasis on the brand level. In this conceptual model we incorporated and linked: (a) a previsit dimension (i.e., previsit attitudes towards the winery and its brands); (b) dimensions of the current winery experience (service quality and satisfaction from the winery experience); and (c) postvisit evaluations concerning brand equity and brand extensibility practices and postvisit behavioral intentions. In other words, the model integrated the three temporal dimensions of the winery experience and produced some interesting conclusions:

- Service quality at the cellar door is a strong positive antecedent of satisfaction obtained from the winery experience. Critical dimensions of service quality include staff knowledge, courteousness and willingness to assist, individualized attention and understanding visitor needs, interest in solving customer problems, convenient business hours and secure transactions. Obviously, the winery staff generally plays a major role in delivering high levels of service quality.



**TABLE 3** Standardized regression weights

Measurement items and latent constructs			Estimate
Brand quality	←	CBBE	.757
Standards	←	CBBE	.793
Recognize	←	CBBE	.753
Postvisit awareness	←	CBBE	.727
Bring characteristics in mind	←	CBBE	.700
Logo recall	←	CBBE	.737
Brand imagine	←	CBBE	.799
First choice	←	CBBE	.653
Revisit intention	←	Behavioral Intentions	.718
Word-of-mouth intention	←	Behavioral Intentions	.895
Enhancement of category preference	←	Behavioral Intentions	.837
Extension popularity	←	Brand extensibility	.850
Extension quality	←	Brand extensibility	.891
Extension better	←	Brand extensibility	.821
Worthwhile experience	←	Satisfaction	.901
Surpassed expectations	←	Satisfaction	.862
Satisfaction	←	Satisfaction	.903
Courteous staff	←	Service quality	.879
Secure transactions	←	Service quality	.861
Staff knowledge	←	Service quality	.851
Staff got things right	←	Service quality	.839
Problem solving	←	Service quality	.844
Convenient business hours	←	Service quality	.793
Customized attention	←	Service quality	.838
Understanding visitors' needs	←	Service quality	.850
Staff willingness	←	Service quality	.910
Did not have to wait excessively	←	Service quality	.891
Quality of wines available for tasting	←	Service quality	.810
Range of wines available for tasting	←	Service quality	.790

*Note.* Statistically significant at the .05 level.

- Satisfaction from the winery experience is a positive antecedent of CBBE. This implies that the winery experience provides an excellent opportunity to build brand equity through visitor satisfaction. Although brand equity is likely to be influenced by a number of other factors and not simply by a winery experience, the latter is likely to contribute to the former through creating positive attitudes and feelings.
- Satisfaction is an antecedent of positive behavioral intentions towards the winery and its brands, with CBBE strongly mediating this relationship. The study confirmed the positive relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions, such as creation of positive word of mouth and revisit intention. Wineries should exploit this relationship in order to enrich their pools of potential visitors and create loyal customers.
- Satisfaction is also a positive antecedent of brand extensibility with CBBE strongly mediating this relationship. This finding suggests that satisfied wine tourists may have more positive attitudes towards a future extension of the winery's brands. This is especially important

for the wine industry, since such attitudes reduce consumer uncertainty and reluctance to try a new wine variety or a new wine label. Thus, a new wine label should more easily enter into the initial choice sets of wine consumers, as the perceived risk declines due to the trust in the initial brand.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The proposed conceptual framework highlighted the effects of the winery experience at the brand level, by using customer perceptions as input. From a theoretical perspective, the approach leverages existing knowledge from different, but related fields (marketing, consumer behavior, services management, wine tourism, and CET literature) and examines the winery experience from these different perspectives. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it uses the winery experience to link wine tourism and CET with visitors' behavioral intentions and attitudes towards brand equity and brand extensibility. Its most important theoretical contribution is that wine tourism—through winery service quality and visitor satisfaction—can influence brand equity building and attitudes towards brand extensibility practices. Additionally, it confirms previously supported relationships (e.g., service quality and satisfaction, satisfaction and behavioral intentions) in the national setting of Greece, a country with extremely limited research in the field of wine tourism.

As wine tourism continues to develop rapidly, there is an increasing need for a deeper understanding of consumer behavior (Sparks, 2007). This study contributes to the wine tourism literature and to our understanding of various wine industry demand-related issues, which are considered to be less researched than the supply-side issues in wine tourism (R. Mitchell et al., 2000; Brown, Havitz, & Getz, 2007). Studies focusing specifically on wine tourists are essential, in order to yield an in-depth understanding of consumer behavior in this context. Such market knowledge is necessary for the implementation of a consumer-centric and marketing-oriented approach from the supply side and the exploitation of the vast opportunities offered for both the wine and broader tourism industries.

Moreover, the conceptual framework presented in this article is in accordance with suggestions made in literature, that wine tourism provides an excellent opportunity to study the on-site tourist experience within a broader temporal context. The study is also a response to the call of Nowak et al. (2006) for research on the effects of the winery experience on brand equity creation, with respect to consumer segments other than the millennials and geographical areas other than the United States. Moreover, the study provides some evidence in response to O'Neill and Charters' (2006) call for further research on the process by which brand loyalty is established during the tasting room encounter.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights the importance of the cellar door experience and its various aspects that contribute to high levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. As Kotler (2003, p. 408) notes, winery visitors usually receive the “expected” services, although more attention should be paid to delivering an “augmented” service that provides benefits beyond current expectations. Wineries should strive to achieve high levels of service quality and deliver experiences that surpass visitor expectations. Aspects like staff friendliness and courteousness, warm welcomes, customized attention, prompt service, and a demonstration of knowledge about and a passion for wine can truly enhance the cellar door experience (Charters, Fountain, & Fish, 2009). In this context, the role of customer contact employees becomes even more pivotal in order to ensure that the winery meets these high service quality standards and offers a tourism experience that truly delights visitors.

Personal interactions with the winery staff are important for the creation of a pleasurable and genuine winery experience. Employee satisfaction is a prerequisite for achieving high levels of service quality, since satisfied employees are more likely to serve visitors better. Thus, winery managers should place emphasis on motivation and job satisfaction of the winery employees, by using various internal marketing and motivational tools.

O’Neill et al. (2002) argued that an effective cellar door may generate strong subsequent brand loyalty by emphasizing factors like contact and responsiveness. The long-term perspective, that is, the establishment of loyalty and long-term relationships with the winery visitors, seems to be more important than achieving direct sales during the cellar door experience. The winery experience should be treated as an opportunity for winery owners and managers to broaden their pool of loyal customers. By offering customized attention to each visitor and by implementing appropriate relationship marketing tools, the customer interface provides a unique opportunity for wineries to differentiate themselves from the competition and invest in the relationship with the customer.

Given that a satisfactory winery experience is positively related to CBBE, winery owners and managers can expect positive effects on brand loyalty, brand awareness and perceived quality of their wines. Additionally, the supported links between satisfaction, CBBE, and brand extensibility practices should help wineries during the launch of new brand extensions, surely a critical issue in such a cluttered industry as that of wine.

Finally, the study enriches the CET literature, by examining the winery experience, which is a form of CET. More broadly, CET was found to exert a strong impact on brand equity building. This is a promising finding for brand managers in various product categories, who seek alternative ways to increase their interactions with customers and gain additional branding

benefits. Special CET events also could provide a solid basis for strong relationships with consumers.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is subject to a number of clear limitations. First of all, a severe limitation is that the measurement of the three phases of the wine tourism experience (previsit, on-site, and postvisit) was examined simultaneously within a single phase, immediately after the end of the visit. Although this decision was made in order to reduce the complexity of the surveying process, it may limit the validity of the results. Future studies examining these three phases separately in the respective time periods will thus be more methodologically robust.

Secondly, the study was based on consumer perceptions and declared behavioral intentions rather than actual behavior. It would certainly be useful to identify the extent to which intentions convert into actual future behavior. As proposed in Nowak et al. (2006), a longitudinal study which tracks survey participants over time would help to determine whether the positive brand effects created from the winery experience continue to be as strong. Moreover, both experiential and natural winery environment could create enhanced positive perceptions or bias in favour of the specific winery and its brands, which may not have prevailed in the actual environment where wine purchases and decisions take action (e.g., a wine store with great wine variety).

Thirdly, the convenience sample used in the study is limited to tourists visiting wineries and wine regions of a single country. A replication of the study in other regions, which exhibit substantial and structural differences in wine tourism, might produce interesting findings and additional support for or improvements to the proposed model. The addition of samples from other wine-producing countries and measurement during all four seasons of the year (when tourist motives for visiting a region might differ), would increase the external validity of the results.

In order to obtain additional evidence on the effects of CET at the brand level, we recommend replicating the study in other settings, apart from that of the wine industry. Future testing of both the initially proposed and revised model could shed new light on the interrelationships of the main constructs. It would also be advisable to retest latent variables with the initially proposed measurement scales in order to evaluate their suitability for the winery setting. Finally, given that wine is usually considered a high-involvement product, it would be worthwhile testing whether the level of involvement with a particular non-wine product category would affect the existence and strength of the above tested relationships.

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