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Impact of experience and emotional state on behavioral intentions: A study of Greek and Italian customers

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the complex dynamics between customer experience, emotional state and behavioral intentions among Greek and Italian customers in the coastal line shipping industry. Through a large-scale survey methodology, encompassing 600 passengers, half of whom are Greek and half Italian, the study investigates how these factors intertwine and how they differ across those two examined nationalities. Employing exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses alongside regression analyses, the findings unveil a positive relationship between customer experience, emotional state, and behavioral intentions, with nationality acting as a significant moderator. This study marks the first empirical assessment of its hypotheses within the ferry context, offering valuable insights for both academics and practitioners aiming to enhance passenger satisfaction and loyalty in the transport sector.

Keywords: *Customer experience, Emotional state, Behavioral intentions, Passenger shipping, Travel Industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The work described in this study was driven by a heightened awareness from academics that much less is known about how the characteristics of the customers and their culture affect the relationship between customers' emotions and behavioral intentions (Manthiou et al., 2020). Also scholars highlight the necessity for future studies assessment on how customer characteristics (e.g., nationality) impact the relationship between customer experience and behavioral intentions (Ali et al., 2018). No study has examined the moderating role of nationality in the relationship between customers' emotions and behavioral intentions.

Following the above research awareness, this study attempts to answer the following questions: Does the customer's nationality moderates the customer experience – behavioral intentions relationship? Does the customer's nationality moderates the emotions – behavioral intentions relationship?

The paper is divided into six sections. Section 2 gives a brief overview of the literature review and hypothesis formation of the constructs of customer experience, emotions, and behavioral intentions. Section 3 analyses the research methodology, design, measurement instruments, and data analysis. Section 4 scrutinizes the results of this study whereas in Section 5, the overall conclusions, practical implications, and avenues for future research are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES FORMATION

Throughout the years researchers have analyzed the relationship between customers' emotions and behavioral intentions and many studies have verified the strong impact of emotions on the customers' behavioral intentions (e.g., Manthiou et al., 2020; Verhulst et al., 2020; Kujur and Singh, 2018). However, much less is known about how the characteristics of the customers and their culture

affect this relationship (Manthiou et al., 2020; Hosany and Prayag, 2013). Following the above discussions, we propose the following hypothesis: *[H1] Nationality has a moderating role in the relationship between customer's emotions and customer's behavioral intention.*

Also, researchers have investigated the effect of customer experience on the customers' behavioral intentions (e.g., Rather and Hollebeek, 2021; Tyrväinen et al., 2020; Ou and Verhoef, 2017; Bilgihan, 2016). However far too little attention has been paid to the examination of the role of the customer characteristics (e.g., nationality) as regards this well thought-out relationship between customer experience and behavioral intentions. Academics stated that future studies should assess how customer characteristics impact this relationship (Ali et al., 2018). Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that: *[H2] Nationality has a moderating role in the relationship between customer experience and behavioral intentions.*

3. DATA & METHODS

A large-scale survey on the coastal line shipping industry was conducted. The random sampling methodology was employed and a structured questionnaire was administered to 600 passengers (300 Greeks and 300 Italians). The data collection occurred in August 2022. The target respondents were passengers embarked on a coastal line ship (traveling on coastal line ships between Greece and Italy), assuring confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaires have been created into two languages (Greek and Italian).

To measure the customer experience in the service environment, Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience economy model was used. Emotions were assessed using seven items, organized in two axes [a. positive and b. negative emotions] (e.g., Kujur and Singh, 2018). Also, in order to measure the customer's behavioral intentions, a combination of the measurement instruments developed by Brown (2005), Rather et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2008), was utilized. All items were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree".

Before run the regression analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the IBM SPSS AMOS (version 26) was performed in order to refine the scales of emotions and customer experience and confirm the existence of their dimensions which have been suggested by the examined literature. CFA was utilized, as the measurement instruments of the above mentioned constructs, have been widely used in the literature and their applicability has been confirmed by various researchers (eg. Medina-Muñoz et al., 2018; Wozniak et al., 2018; Majra et al., 2016). Moreover, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using the IBM SPSS (version 27) software was conducted in order to refine the scale items and reveal the structure of the customer's behavioral intentions. Since there are hardly any empirical studies that investigate the created pattern of customers' behavioral intentions scale in transportation and tourism, EFA was chosen in order to identify the dimensionality of the scale (Hair et al., 2006). Moreover, in order to further validate the EFA results, CFA was also performed in the customer's behavioral intentions construct. To have a satisfactory level of construct reliability, the Cronbach's alpha value was assessed. In all the examined constructs the Cronbach's alpha value is above 0,7 [emotions during the journey 0,797 (stage A), 0,827 (stage B), customer experience 0,925, behavioral intentions 0,908], indicating a very satisfactory level of construct reliability. The examined hypotheses were tested through regression analyses

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 [H1] The moderating role of nationality in the relationship between customer's emotions and customer's behavioral intentions.

In order to investigate potential moderating differences in the customers' emotions – behavioral intentions relationship among the customers' nationalities, two distinct subsamples were employed. The first one contains only the Greek customers, whereas the second only the Italian customers. Two separate regression analyses were run for both subsamples.

Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 summarize the dependent and independent variables, as well as the summary regression statistics for the two distinct subsamples. According to the analyses' results (see Tables 1), the regression is statistically significant (p -value < 0,05) between the two assessed nationalities. More specifically,

- **Greek Nationality:** Greek customers' emotions can interpret 16,5% of their behavioral intentions variability through our model. The model equation is formulated as follows: "**Behavioral Intentions = 6,376 + 0,577*Emotions + e**"
- **Italian Nationality:** Italian customers' emotions can interpret 4,9% of their behavioral intentions

variability through our model. The model equation is formulated as follows: “**Behavioral Intentions = 9,893 + 0,541*Emotions + e**”.

Table 1. Emotions – behavioral intentions relationship

Dependent variable: Behavioral Intentions				
	Greek (n = 300)			
	<i>Adj. R2 = 0,165 / F-value = 67,567 / p-value = 0,000</i>			
	b	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	6,376	0,012	-	-
Emotions	0,577	0,000	1,0	1,0
	Italian (n = 300)			
	<i>Adj. R2 = 0,049 / F-value = 4,380 / p-value = 0,000</i>			
	b	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	9,893	0,010	-	-
Emotions	0,541	0,040	1,0	1,0

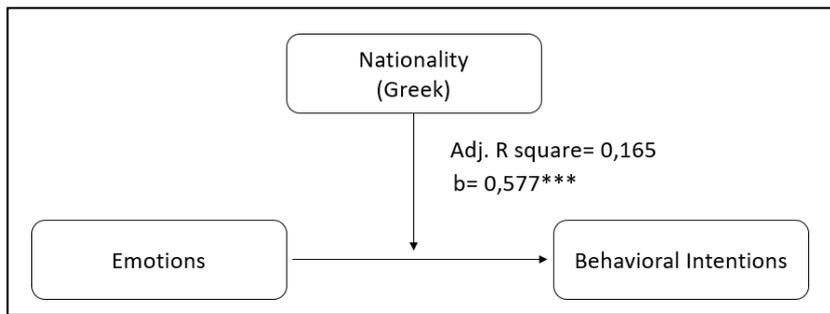


Figure 1.
Greek customers (emotions – behavioral intentions relationship)

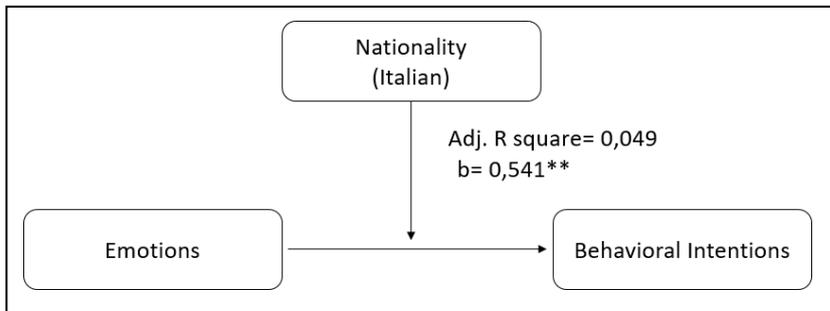


Figure 2.
Italian customers (emotions – behavioral intentions relationship)

In Table 2, it is shown that the percentage interpretation difference between the nationality with the higher interpretation percentage (Greek=16,5%) and the nationality with the lower interpretation percentage (Italian=4,9%) is 11,6%. Therefore the results of the analyses indicate that nationality does moderate the customers' emotions - behavioral intentions relationship and **the hypothesis 1 has been supported, verifying “the moderating role of nationality in the relationship between customer’s emotions and customer’s behavioral intentions”.**

Table 2. Percentages of Emotions' interpretation on Behavioral intentions variability in accordance with the customer's nationality

	Higher Interpretation	Lower Interpretation
Nationality	Greek	Italian
Percentage	16,5%	4,9%

4.2 [H2] The moderating role of nationality in the relationship between customer's experience and customer's behavioral intentions.

In order to investigate potential moderating differences in the customer experience – behavioral intentions relationship among the customers' nationalities two distinct subsamples were employed. The first one contains only the Greek customers, whereas the second only the Italian customers. Two separate regression analyses were run for each subsample.

Table 3 and Figures 3 and 4, summarize the dependent and independent variables, as well as the summary regression statistics for the two distinct subsamples. According to the analyses' results, which are exhibited in Table 3, the regression is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0,05$) among all the assessed nationalities. More specifically,

- **Greek Nationality:** Greek's customer experience can interpret 32,1% of their behavioral intentions variability through our model. The model equation is formulated as follows: **“Behavioral Intentions = 10,202 + 0,412* Customer Experience + e”**.
- **Italian Nationality:** Italian's customer experience can interpret 41,6% of their behavioral intentions variability through our model. The model equation is formulated as follows: **“Behavioral Intentions = 8,112 + 0,498* Customer Experience + e”**.

Table 3. Customer experience – behavioral intentions relationship

Dependent variable: Behavioral Intentions				
Greek (n = 300)				
<i>Adj. R2 = 0,321 / F-value = 160,518 / p-value = 0,000</i>				
	b	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF

Constant	10,202	0,000	-	-
Emotions	0,412	0,000	1,0	1,0
Italian (n = 300)				
<i>Adj. R2 = 0,416 / F-value = 47,299 / p-value = 0,000</i>				
	b	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	8,112	0,019	-	-
Emotions	0,498	0,000	1,0	1,0

In Table 4, it is shown that the percentage interpretation difference between the nationality with the higher interpretation percentage (Italian=41,6%) and the nationality with the lower interpretation percentage (Greek=32,1%) is 9,5%. Therefore the results of the analyses indicate that nationality does moderate the customer experience - behavioral intentions relationship and **the hypothesis 2 has been supported, verifying “the moderating role of nationality in the relationship between customer experience and customer’s behavioral intentions”.**

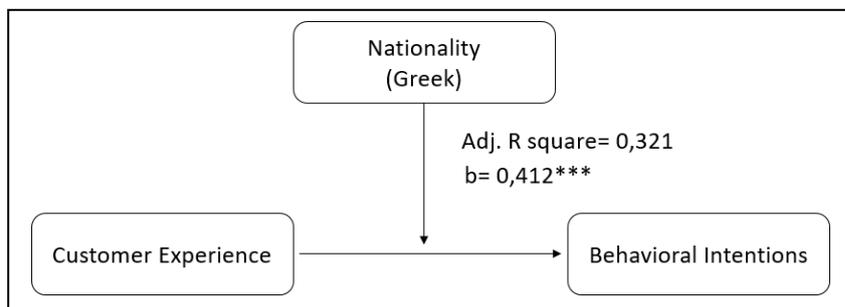


Figure 3.
Greek customers (customer experience – behavioral intentions relationship)

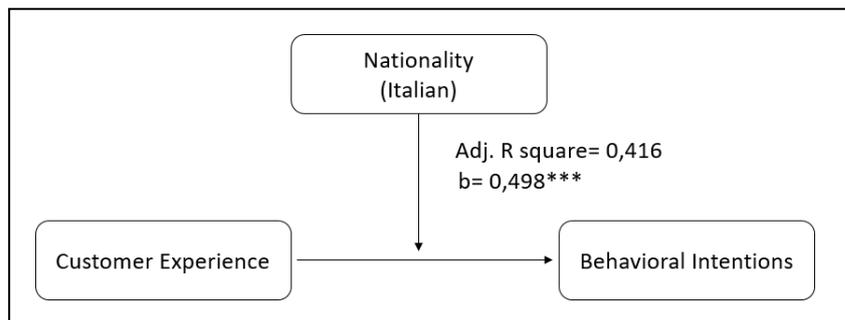


Figure 4.
Italian customers (customer experience – behavioral intentions relationship)

Table 4. Percentages of Customer experience interpretation on Behavioral intentions variability in accordance with the customer's nationality

	Higher Interpretation ←	→ Lower Interpretation
Nationality	Italian	Greek
Percentage	41,6%	32,1%

For all the regression analyses of the three mentioned above research hypotheses the regression assumptions had been tested, in order to confirm that the results of the regression analysis are valid. More specifically, for all the examined relationships of the research hypotheses, it is assessed that the relationship between independent and dependent variable is linear, there is no multicollinearity, the values of the residuals are independent, the variance of the residuals are constant and the residuals are normally distributed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study verified that Nationality does moderate the relationships between customer's emotions - customer's behavioral intentions and customer experience - customer's behavioral intentions.

More specifically, the strongest effect of the nationality exists in the relationship between customer experience and behavioral intentions with values varying from 41,6% to 32,1%, whereas in the relationship between emotions and behavioral intentions values varying from 16,5% to 4,9%. The results of the analysis (see Table 5), are very beneficial for the managers of the tourism and transportation sector, since they provide them with valuable information.

More extensively, in accordance with the result shown in the Table 5, if a manager of a coastal line shipping company in which the majority of the passengers are Greek, aims to ameliorate the behavioral intentions of their passengers, must focus on the emotions of the passengers rather than their customer experience. On the other hand, if the majority of the passengers are Italians, it is more beneficial for the company to assess and improve the customer experience of their passengers rather than their emotions.

The most significant limitation is that only two nationalities were examined. Researchers in future studies may test the hypotheses examined in this study by assessing multiple nationalities.

Table 5. Nationality's interpretation percentage on the examined relationships.

	Higher Interpretation ←	→ Lower Interpretation
Nationality	Italian	Greek
C.E. - B.I. Interpretation percentage	41,6%	32,1%
Nationality	Greek	Italian
EM. - B.I. Interpretation percentage	16,5%	4,9%

* C.E. stands for Customer experience; EM. stands for Emotions; B.I. stands for Behavioral intentions.

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