

Beyond Ethnic Dining Experience: The Humanizing Factor

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Abstract

Ethnic restaurants play a crucial role in the hospitality industry as they preserve and bridge the rich cultural heritage of the past with the evolving demands of current and future customers. This study identified key elements that shape the dining experience, providing valuable new insights. This research aims to analyze the role of ethnic food authenticity and customer interaction as antecedents of the ethnic dining experience as well as their impact on customer delight in ethnic restaurants. This study is a quantitative survey utilizing cross-sectional data gathered through the purposive distribution of questionnaires. A total of 428 samples were collected from three types of ethnic restaurants, specifically those with Sundanese, Balinese, and Padang backgrounds. SmartPLS was used for the statistical analysis, which followed the PLS-SEM method. The findings of the research confirmed that three hypotheses were supported (p -value < 0.05, CI 95%). The strongest influence was from customer interaction (0.465), followed closely by ethnic food authenticity (0.462). In terms of consumer experience, the ethnic dining experience demonstrated a strong mediating role and direct influence on customer delight (0.871). These results align with previous studies, indicating that customer delight can be predicted and explained adequately ($R^2 = 0.759$; $Q^2_{predict} = 0.696$). These findings offer valuable insights for ethnic restaurant managers in their marketing efforts to retain customers and encourage repeat visits. Managers should also carefully consider the layout and spacing of tables to ensure customer comfort and facilitate interaction with dining companions. A limitation of this study is its focus on restaurants in major cities. To generalize the findings, future research should include samples from ethnic restaurants in tourist destinations where culinary tourism is significant.

Keywords: *Ethnic Dining Experience, Ethnic Food Authenticity, Customer Interaction, Customer Delight.*

INTRODUCTION

Consumers visit ethnic restaurants not only to eat but also for a variety of other reasons, including the restaurant's cozy and attractive atmosphere (Nguyen et al., 2020). Some people are interested in trying specialty foods or special menus (Lu et al., 2022). Furthermore, restaurants are frequently used as social gathering places where friends, family, and coworkers can socialize and spend time together (Zatori et al., 2018). According to Aybek and Özdemir (2022), customers choose restaurants based on service quality, recommendations from others, and the desire to try new cuisines. Thus, a restaurant visit can be an immersive experience that includes social, cultural, and sensory aspects in addition to the need to eat (El-Said et al., 2021).

Large cities are hubs of integrated tourism activities with complex life patterns, so urban residents are also tourists who enjoy diverse culinary offerings (Dimitrovski & Crespi Vallbona, 2018). Enjoying food and beverage services that exceed customer expectations will provide a feeling of extreme satisfaction as well as a sense of surprise (Torres et al., 2020). The lifestyle of urban consumers who enjoy culinary experiences includes not only eating but also socializing (Hanks & Line, 2018).

Customer delight has become the subject of debate because there are two different interpretations of the concept. The first understanding views customer delight as an extreme form of satisfaction in which customers experience unusually high levels of satisfaction that exceed their expectations (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). The second understanding, however, holds that customer delight is a distinct construct from satisfaction. According to this viewpoint, customer delight includes not only satisfaction but also an element of surprise and deep happiness resulting from a highly positive and unexpected experience (Collier et al., 2018). Both perspectives

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emphasize how complex the concept of customer delight is and the importance of understanding how it differs from satisfaction to develop effective marketing and service strategies (Barnes & Krallman, 2019).

Of the two understandings of the customer delight construct, more researchers use it as a standalone construct because it has five measurement approaches (Parasuraman et al., 2020) derived from previous measurements. The customer delight construct has been widely used in research in various fields of science such as accounting, retail, theme parks, car dealerships, music concerts, hotels, and other industries (Barnes & Krallman, 2019), but few studies have been conducted on restaurants, which are limited to formal luxury restaurants with full service. Previous research on customer delight did not use experience variables as predictors.

Based on this gap, this study's research questions will include: 1) what are the antecedents of ethnic dining experience and its consequences? 2) Can the Experience variable function as a mediator? To answer the research questions, independent variables such as ethnic food authenticity and customer interaction are proposed, with ethnic dining experience serving as a mediating variable to produce customer delight. The most recent consequence is the connection of previously unexplored independent variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Delight

Customer Delight is the pinnacle of customer experience, where feelings of pleasure arise when service performance positively surprises and provides an extraordinary feeling of pleasure (Kao et al., 2020). The concept of customer delight extends beyond customer satisfaction because delight is a positive emotional reaction that customers have when they receive services or products that are not only satisfying but also provide unexpected value. The customer delight perspective, also known as the satisfaction construct, is measured using the highest scale of satisfaction to represent the feeling of delight (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). Customer delight can be defined as an emotional or affective response to the customer experience based on Plutchik's primary emotion model. Delight necessitates exceptional service or product performance, and Guidice et al. (2020) argue that pleasant experiences are more memorable than satisfying experiences, and thus tend to be stronger in consumers' memories.

Ethnic Dining Experience

Customer experience is defined as an event that personally involves an individual, reflecting each customer's emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual involvement in the experience, and highlighting its subjective nature (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). Experiential marketers view consumers as rational and emotional beings who seek pleasant experiences (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). As the hospitality industry has developed, the scope of customer experience has become more comprehensive, encompassing five dimensions: sensory experience, affective experience, cognitive experience, social experience, and behavioral experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016). In particular, the Ethnic Food Experience represents a customer's subjective response to their overall experience with service providers, which is similarly categorized into these five dimensions: sensory experience, affective experience, cognitive experience, social experience, and behavioral experience (Lee & Park, 2019). This expanded understanding acknowledges the complexity and multifaceted nature of customer interactions within the hospitality sector.

Ethnic Food Authenticity

Food authenticity can be expressed through information on the traditional cooking process, the presence of information on the origin or region of raw materials, and other information support certificates, which serve as a significant quality cue (Hong et al., 2023). Ethnic food authenticity refers to the value of a food's authenticity as expressed through traditional cooking process information, the presence of information about the origin or region of raw materials, and other information support certificates as a significant quality cue (Chousou & Mattas, 2019). Restaurant authenticity positively influences perceived value, and market responses are more likely to use authenticity to convey judgments about restaurant quality (Liu et al. 2018). Authentic food represents the authenticity, honesty, and sincerity of culture as embodied in a food product (Zhang et al., 2019).

Customer Interaction

Customers' social interactions with loved ones, such as family, partners, friends, and relatives, occur while they are in the restaurant. Hospitality and tourism experiences differ from other types of product consumption in that they are unique and irreplaceable (Cao, 2016). The concept of social service is based on the service environment, which is represented by human interaction. In general, services are interactions in a common area with waiters and other customers (Hanks & Line, 2018). In the hospitality and tourism industries, customer interaction frequently outnumbers customer interaction with service providers, and the presence of other customers becomes an integral part of the experience (Baker & Kim, 2018).

Hypotheses Development

Ethnic Food Authenticity and Ethnic Dining Experience

According to studies, the authenticity and uniqueness of food at an event is an important factor in attracting people to visit (Ab Latif, 2018). A study on cultural heritage in Macao found that perceived authenticity improves experience quality (Li et al., 2016). Gastronomy is an essential part of the travel experience and one of the "best things to do" in many places. A study of international tourists who tried traditional dishes found that food authenticity and cultural contrast had a positive effect on perceived experience, whereas product adaptation reduced perceptions of authenticity and cultural contrast (Antón et al., 2019). Based on the description above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Ethnic food authenticity has a positive effect on the ethnic dining experience

Customer Interaction and Ethnic Dining Experience

Interactions between customers result in the mutual influence of customers involved, either directly or indirectly, which can provide positive or negative experiences between customers, allowing the interaction to be viewed as an exchange process in which individuals exchange information, emotions, and feelings to facilitate the development of a relationship. Customers can indirectly influence one another through their participation in the environment or through specific interpersonal interactions, affecting their overall satisfaction with the customer experience (Varma et al., 2021). Marketing research examines interactions within the context of the employee-customer relationship. According to research, buyer-seller interactions have a significant impact on customer experience and value creation (Lin et al., 2020). Based on the previous studies presented, a hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Customer interaction has a positive effect on the ethnic dining experience

Ethnic Dining Experience and Customer Delight

A study of five-star hotel customers in Korea found that affective, social, and behavioral experiences all had a significant impact on customer delight (Lee and Park, 2019). Furthermore, the overall experience of visitors to the chocolate exhibition had a positive and significant impact on customer delight (Jeon, Yoo, and Kim 2020). The happiness construct, which represents a positive travel experience, was also found to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction (Escobar Rivera et al., 2019). Based on these findings, it is suggested that customer delight can be improved through affective, social, behavioral, and holistic experiences, as well as the creation of happiness in a variety of service and tourism settings. Based on the explanation given above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Ethnic dining experience has a positive effect on customer delight

Berdasarkan uraian pengembangan hipotesis, model penelitian yang diusulkan adalah sebagai berikut:

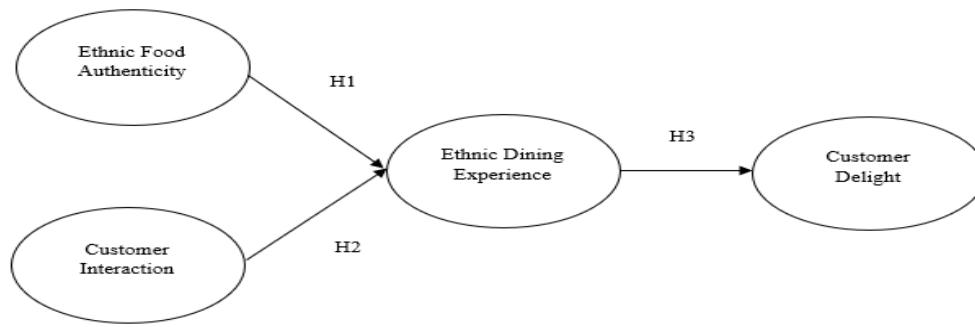


Figure 1. The Conceptual Research Framework

Source: Owned Development (2024)

METHODS

Samples and Procedures

This study is a quantitative, cross-sectional survey. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire divided into two parts: the first contains the profiles of the respondents who provided data, and the second contains indicators related to the variables to be tested. The research object in this study is a semi-formal restaurant that offers on-site dining services for typical Nusantara dishes. The selected variable is customer delight with indicators adapted from research (Parasuraman et al., 2020), which will be predicted by ethnic dining experience variables with indicators from research (Cao, 2016; Lee & Park, 2019), ethnic food authenticity variables with indicators from research (Chen et al., 2020), and customer interaction.

Measurement

In this study, the unit of analysis is individuals, specifically customers whose population is unknown. A minimum sample size of 160 samples is required using a probability sampling error calculation of 5% (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). The sampling technique used is purposive sampling (Sekaran & Buggie, 2016) and measurement of indicators using Likert scale 1 = strongly disagree, scale 2 = disagree, scale 3 = neutral, scale 4 = agree and scale 5 = strongly agree. The data analysis method uses the PLS-SEM approach because this research will predict and explain the relationship between constructs (Hair et al 2018) with SmartPLS 4.0.8.7 software.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

This study aims to evaluate customer experiences at ethnic archipelago restaurants in Jakarta, Indonesia. In the third week of December 2023, quantitative data was collected via an online survey that used a Google Form questionnaire. Respondents were customers who had gone to the restaurant with others, paid for it themselves or through a close friend, and were active on social media. A total of 428 respondents met the research sample criteria. Table 1 shows the demographic information provided by respondents.

TABLE 1. PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Profile	Description	Total	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	231	54
	Female	197	46
Total		428	100
Age (Years)	25 – 30	240	56
	31 – 35	81	19
	36 – 40	60	14
	>40	47	11
Total		428	100
Occupation	Entrepreneur	128	30
	Private sectors	175	41
	Government official	13	3

	Housewife	73	17
	Freelancer	30	7
	Others	9	2
Total		428	100
Educational background	High School/Equivalent	77	18
	Bachelor/Graduates	218	51
	Postgraduate	133	31
Total		428	100
Frequency of visiting restaurants in a month.	0-1	231	54
	2-3	154	36
	>3	43	10
Total		428	100
Restaurant preferences	Manadonese Restaurant	171	40
	Sundanese Restaurant	137	32
	Balinese Restaurant	120	28
Total		428	100
Ethnicity	Javanese	171	40
	Chinese	94	22
	Sundanese	34	8
	Balinese	39	9
	Bataknese	56	13
	Eastern Indonesian people	26	6
	Others	8	2

Source: research data (2024)

According to the respondents' demographic profile, most of them (54%) were men. The majority of participants (56%) were between the ages of 25 and 30, followed by those aged 31 to 35 (19%), 36 to 40 (14%), and over 40 (11%). Next, 41% of respondents work in the private sector. 51% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, while the remainder had postgraduate and high school or equivalent degrees (31% and 18%, respectively). Forty percent of the respondents were Javanese, twenty-two percent were Chinese, thirteen percent were north Sumatrans, nine percent were Balinese, eight percent were Sundanese, six percent were eastern Indonesians, and the remaining two percent were from other tribes. Based on the behavioral data of respondents (table 1), it is stated that the majority of the respondents' frequency of visiting restaurants 0-1 times a month is 54 percent, the frequency of 2-3 times visits a month is 36 percent, and the frequency of visiting more than 3 times a month is 10 percent.

Measurement Model

Outer Loading

Outer model analysis assesses the reliability and validity of all constructs and indicators used in the study. Based on the calculation results, the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and CR (Convergent Reliability) values will be obtained, as well as the outer loading value. The provisions for AVE ≥ 0.5, CR ranging from 0.7 to 0.95, and outer loading ≥ 0.7.

Checking the outer loading is the first step in evaluating the outer model because it ensures the validity of each indicator (indicator reliability). Almost all outer loading values, except two indicators, exceeded the predetermined threshold of 0.7, as shown in the PLS-SEM data analysis. These indicators are considered reliable in measuring their constructs if the loading value for reflective indicators exceeds the 0.7 threshold. Simply put, this indicates that the indicator can maintain consistency when used regularly (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

TABLE 2. CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Variable	Code	Indicator	Outer loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Ethnic Dining Experience	AEDE1	This restaurant can trigger my positive feelings about regional cultural diversity.	0,864	0.902	0.931	0.773
	AEDE2	I feel that the service provided in this restaurant makes me proud of the richness of regional culture.	0,846			
	AEDE3	I have fond memories of my visit to this restaurant.	0,827			

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	AEDE4	The service is provided when eating at this restaurant. gives a positive impression on me.	0,817			
	CEDE1	I think that the food and beverage service at this restaurant is unique to the culture of origin of the food.	0,799			
	CEDE2	I think eating at this restaurant can trigger my curiosity about the food served.	0,813			
	CEDE3	I think this restaurant serves food cooked traditionally.	0,902			
Customer Interaction	CIT1	I had a great time interacting with my peers while at this restaurant.	0,917	0,936	0,945	0,84
	CIT2	I was able to have a pleasant interaction with my family while at this restaurant.	0,926			
	CIT3	I had the pleasure of interacting with my partner while at this restaurant.	0,904			
	CIT4	I felt relaxed as I interacted with old friends during my time at this restaurant.	0,919			
Ethnic Food Authenticity	EFA1	In my opinion. the appearance of the food at this restaurant reflects the culture of the food's origin.	0,796	0,862	0,901	0,646
	EFA2	In my opinion. the food at this restaurant is cooked with regional specialties. .	0,848			
	EFA3	In my opinion. this restaurant serves food with chili sauce typical of the region where the food comes from.	0,829			
	EFA4	In my opinion. this restaurant traditionally serves food using banana leaves.	0,706			
	EFA5	In my opinion. this restaurant serves food the way it was served in the region of origin.	0,831			
Customer Delight	CDFE1	I feel happy when I visit this restaurant.	0,823	0,815	0,937	0,668
	CDFE2	This restaurant welcomed me like a special guest	0,838			
	CDFE3	I was impressed to find regional specialities at this restaurant.	0,828			
	CDIP1	At this restaurant, the waitress recommended a menu of food for me to order.	0,811			
	CDIP2	At this restaurant, the waitresses were enthusiastic about serving me and other customers.	0,884			
	CDIP3	In this restaurant, the waiters served me and other customers professionally.	0,873			
	CDPS1	At this restaurant, the food was served faster than I expected.	0,795			
	CDPS2	This restaurant served food with more flavor than I wanted.	0,815			
	CDPS3	This restaurant fulfilled a special request relating to my order.	0,813			
	CDS1	Traditional music plays in this restaurant, making the atmosphere more memorable.	0,801			
	CDS2	The atmosphere of this restaurant left me with a favorable impression.	0,856			
	CDS3	The presentation of the food I had at this restaurant blew me away.	0,858			
	CDC1	At this restaurant, I can choose a table for two or a family.	0,768			
	CDC2	At this restaurant, I can order food with the level of spiciness I want.	0,712			
	CDC3	At this restaurant, I was able to ask the waiter to serve the drinks with sugar separately.	0,662			
	CDT1	The waitstaff at this restaurant, responds deftly when I need assistance.	0,871			
	CDT2	This restaurant provides food and beverage services to guests quickly.	0,852			
	CDT3	This restaurant gives me enough time to enjoy my meal with my family or friends.	0,919			

CA=Cronbach Alpha. CR=Composite Reliability. AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Source: Prepared by authors (2024)

This study begins with an examination of the outer model. Indicators that did not meet the specified threshold value of 0.708 were eliminated based on the outer loading findings. Consequently, all remaining indicators are deemed reliable for measuring each research item, as their combined values exceed 0.708. The next step involves assessing construct reliability using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA) values. In this study, construct reliability is considered acceptable because all indicator values are greater than 0.7 and do not exceed the upper bound of 0.95 (Table 2).

To ensure research validity, an evaluation of the average variance extracted (AVE) value was conducted. All research constructs achieved an AVE value of at least 0.5, indicating that they can explain at least half of the variance items in the model. To determine discriminant validity, we used the hetero-trait/mono-trait ratio (HT/MT), which is more accurate in detecting discriminant problems. The validity test in this study found that all constructs had HT/MT values below 0.9 (Table 3). This indicates that the indicators in the research model were well discriminated, allowing for accurate measurement of the constructs.

The structural model uses R^2 to measure predictive accuracy, $Q^2_{predict}$ to assess predictive relevance, and evaluates variable significance and coefficients to determine hypothesis support. Before this, the inner variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to assess common method bias caused by measurement errors or biases. This study found that all constructs have an inner VIF value of less than 3, indicating no common method bias in the model.

Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity can then be assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). According to Hair et al. (2022), HTMT provides more accurate methods for assessing discriminant validity, such as using a multitrait-multimethod matrix or Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Discriminant validity between two constructs is established when the HTMT value is less than 0.9. The data in Table 3 show that all HTMT values are below 0.9. As a result, these findings confirm that all indicators in this research model accurately distinguish and measure the construct.

TABLE 3. HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT RATIO (HTMT) VALUES

	Customer Delight	Customer interaction	Ethnic dining experience	Ethnic food authenticity
Customer Delight				
Customer interaction	0.801 CI95% (0,750;0,848)			
Ethnic dining experience	0.912 CI95% (0,885;0,935)	0.814 CI95% (0,746;0,872)		
Ethnic food authenticity	0.780 CI95% (0,731;0,824)	0.716 CI95% (0,647;0,778)	0.845 CI95% (0,801;0,885)	

Source: Prepared by authors (2024)

The output of $PLS_{predict}$ can be used to assess predictive ability at the construct indicator level (Shmueli et al., 2019), based on the requirements outlined in Hair et al.'s flowchart. The cross-validated predictive ability test (CVPAT), developed by Liengaard et al. (2021), is now recommended for measuring prediction-oriented model comparisons in PLS-SEM. This study's findings provided CVPAT data compared to the average indicator (IA), both overall and by indicator (Table 4). The results show a lower average loss (negative value), indicating strong predictive ability. According to the flowchart by Sharma et al. (2022), this model has predictive validity. A comparison with the linear model (LM) revealed a higher average loss value with negative results and significance, further implying that this research model is highly predictive.

TABLE 4. CROSS-VALIDATED PREDICTIVE ABILITY TEST (CVPAT)

Variable	PLS-SEM vs Indicator Average (IA)		PLS-SEM vs Linear Model (LM)	
	Average loss difference	p-value	Average difference loss	p-value
Customer Delight	-0.436	0.000	-0.002	0.812
Ethnic Dining Experience	-0.459	0.000	-0.007	0.175
Overall	-0.443	0.000	-0.004	0.599

Source: research data (2024)

Structural Model

Inner model analysis aims to evaluate the relationships between latent variables in a research model. This stage involves conducting a one-tailed hypothesis test based on the proposed hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019). The hypothesis testing uses the re-sampling or bootstrapping method, facilitated by the SmartPLS® 4.0.8.7 software.

Bootstrapping, a non-parametric procedure, utilizes re-sampling techniques to test the significance and coefficients (Shmueli et al., 2019). Before testing the hypotheses, the output or results of the inner model test are assessed and reported to evaluate the quality of the proposed research model. The parameters used to evaluate model quality in the inner model include the variance inflation factor (VIF), R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 predict (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019).

In this diagram, p-values for the paths within the research model are presented. A p-value of less than 0.05 indicates a significant relationship (Hair et al., 2019). According to Hair et al. (2019), a detailed evaluation of the inner model results begins with assessing model quality to ensure measurement fit, like covariance-based methods. This confirmation ensures that each path demonstrates a significant relationship. The comprehensive evaluation of the inner model will be developed according to the recommendations of Sarstedt et al. (2022a), ensuring a thorough and accurate analysis of the research model's relationships.

This section evaluates the importance and significance of the path coefficients. The hypotheses were tested using both the bootstrapping method in PLS-SEM and the regression model. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation for all hypotheses tested in the study, as shown in Figure 2.

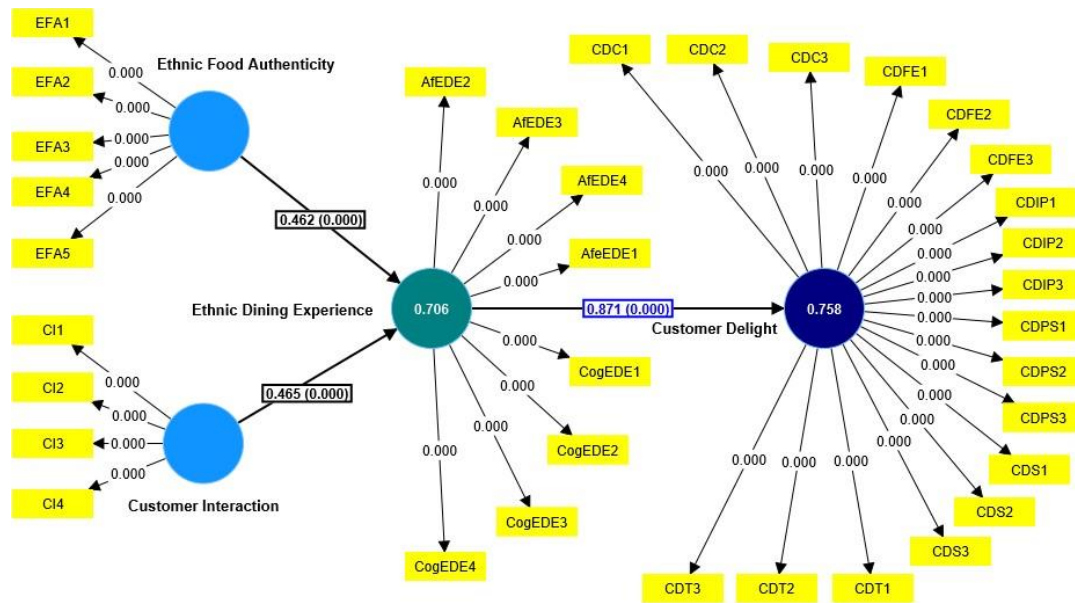


FIGURE 2. STRUCTURAL MODEL

Source: research data (2024)

Table 5 shows the model fitness of research where R^2 is more than 0,333, cross-validated redundancy is positive and greater than zero, and the SRMR value is less than 0,08.

TABLE 5. MODEL FITNESS OF RESEARCH

	R^2	Q^2	SRMR
Customer Delight	0.759	0.696	0,05
Ethnic dining experience	0.706	0.654	

Source: Prepared by authors (2024)

The next step in structural model analysis, which is important for answering research questions, is the significance test on the three paths in this research model. At this point, the primary goal is to determine whether the relationship between the variables in the research model is significant enough to be generalized at the population level. This test employs the bootstrapping method with re-sampling and is run through SmartPLS®4.0.8.7 (Hair Jr, 2020; Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). The results of this hypothesis testing are evaluated using two values from empirical test results: the significance value and the coefficient. Because the hypothesis

is directional and tested using a one-sided test, the coefficient's orientation must be consistent with it. Hair et al. (2019) found that a p-value of <0.05 indicates that the research hypothesis is supported. The results of the hypothesis test in this study are presented in the table below:

TABLE 6. HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypotheses		Std. Coefficient	P-values	Confidence Interval		Result	F ²
				5.0%	95.0%		
H1	Ethnic Food Authenticity -> Ethnic Dining Experience	0,462	0,000	0,885	0,914	Hypothesis Supported	0,428
H2	Customer Interaction -> Ethnic Dining Experience	0,465	0,000	0,937	0,954	Hypothesis Supported	0,422
H3	Ethnic Dining Experience-> Customer Delight	0,871	0,000	0,969	0,977	Hypothesis Supported	3,140

Source: Prepared by authors (2024)

From Table 6 presented above, it can be concluded that three hypotheses tested in the research model have coefficient values that match the hypothesis and significantly affect. This is in line with previous research which states that ethnic food authenticity has a positive influence on ethnic dining experience (Yuliantoro & Antonio, 2022), as well as customer interaction variables have a positive effect on ethnic dining experience (Lin et al., 2020) and ethnic dining experience variables affect customer delight (Jeon, Yoo, and Kim 2020).

According to the results of hypothesis testing, the variables with the greatest influence on ethnic dining experience are customer interaction (=0.465), followed by ethnic food authenticity (=0.462). Furthermore, ethnic dining experience correlates positively with customer delight (=0.320). The path segment of ethnic dining experience to customer delight had a statistically significant value (p < 0.05).

Specific Indirect effect to determine the relationship between variables indirectly by involving mediating variables between the relationship of two variables. A variable is said to be intervening or mediating if the t statistical value > t table with p-value <0.05. In Table 7, the statistical t value is above the t table value, so it can be said that the ethnic food experience variable is a moderating variable in the relationship between ethnic food authenticity and customer interaction variables with customer delight.

TABLE 7 SPECIFIC INDIRECT EFFECT

Relationship between variables	Original Sample	T statistic	P-value	Result
<i>Ethnic Food Authenticity → Ethnic Food Experience → Customer Delight</i>	402	8,674	0.000	Mediating Variable
<i>Consumer interaction → Ethnic Food Experience → Customer Delight</i>	405	7.759	0.000	Mediating Variable

DISCUSSION

This research aims to analyze the role of ethnic dining experience in ethnic restaurants and their influence on customer delight with two independent variables, namely ethnic food authenticity, and customer interaction. The model that aims to predict the dependent variable of customer delight is empirically tested in the context of ethnic restaurants in Indonesia. In the research model, three hypotheses are tested with data on consumers who often visit and enjoy ethnic dishes in a cross-cultural manner. That is, consumers from certain ethnic backgrounds will not judge restaurants with the same ethnic background. Out of the three hypotheses proposed, all of them are significant. The direct predictor of customer delight is the ethnic dining experience, so these findings is in line with previous research which states that experience in the context of hospitality service is more dominant by using feelings. Likewise, in the context of ethnic restaurants, many attributes are evaluated using feelings.

This study's results are aligned with previous studies (Premordia & Gál, 2023; Sattarzadeh et al., 2023) that the food and atmosphere in a restaurant will influence consumers to visit again because of the perceived dining experience (Aybek & Özdemir, 2022; Tan et al., 2022). However, interesting findings from this study state that

affective experience is strongly influenced by service encounters and customer interaction even though ethnic food authenticity has a significant influence. This research is in line with Bitner's concept (1992) which states that interactions between customers and waiters enhance the affective experience in ethnic restaurants. Furthermore, consumers go to restaurants not only to eat but there are other agendas where there is a need for social interaction between customers (Rashid et al., 2021).

The proposed research model demonstrates an R^2 value of 0.759 for customer delight, indicating that it has sufficient explanatory power, as it accounts for more than fifty percent of the variance. Additionally, the model's predictive ability, assessed using a new method called CVPAT, shows strong predictive validity. The CVPAT approach is a more recent method in PLS-SEM compared to blindfolding and is considered more accurate in evaluating the model's predictive ability through out-of-sample comparisons. Therefore, this model is recommended for replication in future studies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the two critical aspects of experience highlighted in the experience marketing theory, namely a holistic experience, can effectively predict customer delight. If the customer experience improves in both cognitive and affective dimensions, consumers are more likely to experience delight. Therefore, ethnic restaurant managers must aim to create a deeply memorable experience that fosters a strong connection with their customers. This unique experience can serve as a key differentiator, allowing ethnic restaurants to compete more effectively with other establishments.

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of customer interaction and the authenticity of ethnic food in shaping a positive customer experience. Restaurant managers need to consider these factors carefully when planning marketing strategies to align with consumer desires. By focusing on enhancing customer interaction and maintaining food authenticity, ethnic restaurants can create a compelling and delightful experience that attracts and retains customers.

Practical Implication

Therefore, this finding highlights an important consideration for management: when serving consumers, it is essential to provide friendly, warm service with a genuine smile. Such hospitality can be directly perceived and appreciated by customers. Additionally, managers should pay careful attention to the layout of tables and chairs, as well as the spacing between tables, to ensure that consumers feel comfortable and have the opportunity to interact freely with their dining companions.

It is crucial to recognize that the theme of a restaurant and the variety of food menus offered play a significant role in the overall dining experience. Equally important is the relationship between waitstaff and customers; this interaction is a critical component of the service provided in the restaurant. Therefore, management must consider these factors meticulously to create an environment that enhances customer satisfaction and encourages repeat visits.

Future Research

Several limitations can be identified in this study. One major limitation is the lack of segmentation of respondents based on their personality backgrounds, which may influence their affective and cognitive perceptions of the assessments. For instance, individuals who score high on openness to experience are likely to rely on cognitive evaluations, while extroverts may prioritize social interactions and engagement. Therefore, incorporating personality variables as moderators would provide a more nuanced understanding of the assessment process.

Another limitation is that the study focuses solely on restaurants located in major cities. To generalize the findings, it is essential to test the model with samples from ethnic restaurants in tourist destinations, where culinary tourism is a significant part of the travel experience. This broader sampling would help determine if the observed effects hold in different contexts and among diverse customer groups.

By addressing these limitations in future research, the study could offer more comprehensive insights into the factors influencing customer experiences and behaviors in various settings.

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