

Effect of Experience Quality on Ethnic Restaurant Customer Loyalty: Mediating Role of Restaurant Image

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ABSTRACT

This study tests the relationship between experience quality, restaurant image, and customer loyalty in Indonesian ethnic restaurants. In addition, this study tests the mediating role of restaurant image in the relationship between experience quality and customer loyalty. A total of 205 respondents participated in this study. This study employed PLS with the smartPLS program to test the proposed research objectives. The findings indicated that service quality, food quality, and physical environment quality as dimensions of experience quality played essential roles in creating a positive restaurant image. Furthermore, this study found that restaurant image significantly affects customer loyalty. This study discovered the mediating functions of restaurant image in the relationship between experience quality dimensions and customer loyalty. Upon completing the research objectives, this study provides theoretical and practical contributions.

Keywords: Customer Loyalty, Experience Quality, Ethnic Restaurant, Restaurant Image

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality industry is an industry that is growing rapidly after the pandemic subsides. Several government programs are directed at increasing the growth and competitiveness of the tourism and hospitality industry players. As an essential part of the tourism and hospitality industry, the restaurant sector plays an essential role in the growth of this industry. Since the decline in Covid-19 cases, various restaurants have grown and developed rapidly. One type of restaurant being developed is an ethnic restaurant. Hwang, Kim, Choe, and Chung (2018) described an ethnic restaurant as a restaurant that is diverse from other restaurants because it represents the uniqueness of a country's culture both in appearance and the menu served. As a form of a currently proliferating restaurant, ethnic restaurants are faced with very tight industry competition. Therefore, ethnic restaurant managers need the right strategy to maintain their business.

Based on the marketing literature, the concept of a long-term relationship is the right concept that can be used by the restaurant industry, especially ethnic restaurant managers, to maintain business continuity. This means that consumers do not only make one-time purchases but will also make repeat purchases. Based on this, it is clear that the concept of customer long terms relationships cannot be separated from the notion of customer loyalty. Suhartanto, Clemes, and Dean (2013) explained that loyal customers are consumers who voluntarily make repeat purchases and convey the positive word of mouth to potential customers.

Previous studies have explained that the experience consumers gain when interacting or transacting with service providers is an important factor in ensuring long-term relationships with consumers. Research from Wu and Cheng (2019) in the marketing field showed that experience quality has a significant positive effect on consumer loyalty. However, there is still a research gap that can be identified in the relationship between experience quality and loyalty, as these previous studies haven't explained clearly the process of how to experience quality that affects loyalty (Hussein, 2018).

To close the research gap, this study includes a restaurant image as a mediating variable effect of experience quality on loyalty. This study comprises restaurant image as a mediating variable because previous studies found the important role of the image on loyalty (Channoi, & Dean, 2018; Hussein, 2018) and image results from a quality experience (Wu & Cheng, 2019). Based on this background, this study aims to examine the role of experience quality in increasing the loyalty of ethnic restaurant consumers. In addition, this study also aims to investigate the mediating of restaurant image on the experience quality and loyalty. To gain a comprehensive understanding of experience quality, this study will specifically examine the effect of food quality, physical environment quality, and service quality as important dimensions of experience quality (Hussein, 2018; Sekarsari, Rohman, & Hussein, 2016) on image and loyalty. After answering the research objectives, this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research will show a comprehensive relationship between experience quality, restaurant image, and ethnic restaurant consumer loyalty. This research provides an overview for ethnic restaurant managers to create loyal customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous theory states that to improve customer experience and loyalty, business people must provide quality experience and satisfaction to customers in order to increase customer satisfaction. It plays a key role in increasing customer loyalty. The concept of tourist loyalty for ethnic restaurants is derived from the concept of consumer

loyalty. Andreassen and Lindestad (2014) explain that having loyal customers supply more advantages for companies than getting new customers. In line with this thought (Hapsari, 2018) suggests that a loyal consumer will make a purchase in the future and also provide positive recommendations to other consumers. In addition, loyal consumers will tolerate a fault made by companies (Hapsari, 2018). Therefore, in the marketing concept, consumer loyalty is a form of consumer behavior that fosters long-term relationships with consumers.

Hussein and Hapsari (2020) explain that experience results from an interaction between service providers and consumers. Therefore, the quality of experience results from superior interaction and is not forgotten by consumers. However, Lemke, Clark, and Wilson (2011) state that the quality of experience is a culture-based construct. Research in the field of tourism and hospitality by Namkung and Jang (2007) explains that food quality, service quality (Clemes, Shu, & Gan, 2014), and physical environment quality (Hussein, 2018) are three essential dimensions that shape the quality of experience.

Lemke, Clark, and Wilson (2011) stated that customer experience quality is defined as the experience by consumers in the form of quality that is considered superior and is a subjective reaction given to direct experience or strangeness with the company. An experience is the sum total of all aspects that a customer has experienced at the point of contact between the customer and the company (Joshi, Saksham, Tanvi, & Shreya, 2016). Thus, the quality of experience can be considered as an emotional response from consumers and also becomes part of the consumer's assessment of the overall experience in consuming certain products and services. In addition, a quality experience is not only interpreted as a feeling more from consumers towards what consumers want.

The quality of customer experience has become an important concept in consumer behavior research based on several previous studies (Fernandes & Cruz, 2007) suggesting that the quality of experience is considered to be able to go beyond service due to the contemporary needs of consumers, namely looking for experiences that can be emotionally memorable for them. Meanwhile, Chan and Baum (2007) explain that the quality of the experience is related to the psychological outcomes resulting from visitor participation in tourism activities. Zhong and Moon (2020) state that there are three dimensions of quality that can affect customer satisfaction, service quality, food quality, and the physical environment.

Experience quality is formed by the physical environment between actions and will significantly affect customer loyalty. Supported by research conducted by Andreassen and Lindestad (2014) shows that customer loyalty will be higher when they perceive a positive experience. Chan and Baum (2007) concluded that a good experience is obtained from understanding customer expectations, delivering the right product at every opportunity, and various other factors that will lead to loyalty. With competition getting stronger, experience is the best way to differentiate rather than having to compete on price and launch marketing programs that can cost a lot.

In addition to food quality, service quality is an important factor that must be improved in order to meet or exceed customer expectations. Ali, Puah, Ayub, and Raza (2020) stated that service quality affects customer loyalty. This is also in line with Perez-Moron et al. (2022), who states that superior service quality will make customer satisfied and thus will lead to loyalty. Wu, Cheng, Chen, and Hong (2018) said that service quality also emphasizes the perspective of company services provided to tourists. Researchers have determined that service quality is the provision of services in coordination, matching without prejudice to customer wishes (Prayag, Hosany, Taheri, & Ekiz, 2020).

The marketing literature explains that as a result of memorable and superior interactions, the quality of the experience has been proven to be an important determinant of image enhancement. Previous studies have shown a significant positive effect of the quality of experience on the brand image (Islam, Hollebeek, Rahman, Khan, & Rasool, 2019). These studies explain that the better the quality of experience obtained by consumers, the better the brand image. As with marketing research, research in tourism and hospitality finds an important role in the quality of experience in restaurant image. The results of this study indicate that a restaurant that can produce an excellent visiting experience will produce a positive image of its consumers. Therefore, this study believes that the quality of experience will significantly and positively influence a restaurant's image. Specifically, this study formulates that food quality, service quality, and physical environment quality as dimensions of experience quality positively and significantly influence restaurant image.

H1a: service quality has a significant and positive effect on restaurant image

H1b: food quality has a significant and positive effect on restaurant image

H1c: physical environment quality has a significant and positive effect on restaurant image

The physical environment aspect makes it easier for consumers to get information on what is on offer from these tours. The physical environment is included in a customer's affective response to the psychological benefits they desire from the visiting experience (Wu, Cheng, Chen, & Hong, 2018). A study by Wu and Cheng (2019) stated that the physical environment affects customer loyalty. The quality of the physical environment that is obtained through the interior design of a gastronomic tourist spot will also bring up a good image in the eyes of customers, as well as customer satisfaction. It assumes the physical environment can be a driver of consumer happiness and can improve the quality of life (Ma, QU, & Eliwa, 2014; Gong & Yi, 2018). The physical environment of a thematic restaurant can make tourists believe based on experience, which will be decisive in creating and maintaining long-term or sustainable relationships. So that the physical environment must be used as a consideration for business actors to compete with other restaurants in gaining consumer loyalty.

As an important part of a company's marketing strategy, image is essential in building loyalty. A company with a positive image will make consumers increasingly intend to re-transact with that company. Previous studies have proven the important role of brand image in increasing consumer loyalty (Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017). These studies explain that the more positive the image of the company, the higher the intention of consumers to make transactions again and provide positive recommendations to other consumers.

As in marketing studies, image is an important factor in tourism and hospitality studies. Research in tourism and hospitality shows that restaurant image is vital in increasing consumer loyalty. Consumers tend to make repeated transactions with restaurants that have a positive image. Therefore, this study suspects that restaurant image has a significant positive effect on consumer loyalty.

H2: restaurant image has a significant and positive effect on consumer loyalty.

Marketing and tourism and hospitality literature explain that a positive image, especially the image of a restaurant as part of the service industry, cannot be separated from the experience consumers gain when conducting transactions with the restaurant. The better the experience felt by consumers of a restaurant, the more positive the image of the restaurant of consumers. The positive image of the restaurant, as perceived by consumers will strengthen the consumer's intention to make transactions with the

restaurant again (Hapsari, 2018). Therefore, this study suspects that the quality of experience indirectly affects consumer loyalty by creating a restaurant image.

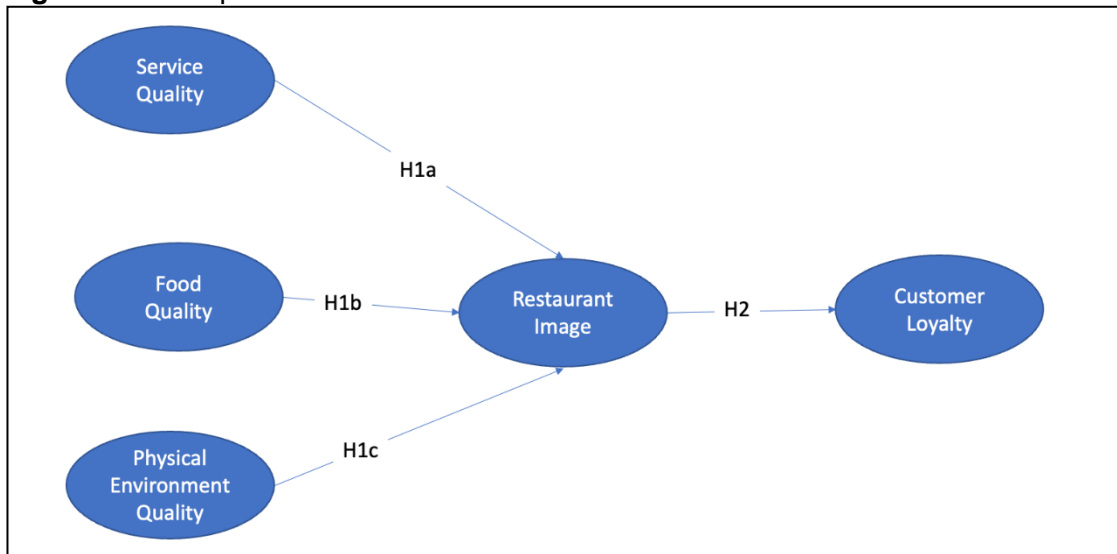
H3a: restaurant image mediates the effect of service quality on consumer loyalty.

H3b: restaurant image mediates the effect of food quality on consumer loyalty.

H3c: restaurant image mediates the effect of physical environment quality on consumer loyalty.

Based on the literature review conducted, the conceptual model developed in this study is as follows:

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



RESEARCH METHOD

This research used explanatory research with a quantitative research type. Explanatory research is a method used to explain the relationship between variables and other variables by using hypothesis testing that has been formulated. Besides that, explanatory research is used to explain the position of a variable. The research was conducted in several ethnic and thematic restaurants through online and offline questionnaires. The research time was conducted for four weeks to obtain respondent data on distributing questionnaires online via Google Forms. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed in this study. However, only 205 questionnaires were processed for data analysis. This study took data from several ethnic restaurants in Malang, East Java, using the convenience sampling method. Respondents who can participate in this study must be at least 18 years old, have visited at least one ethnic restaurant, and visited on their own accord. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire instrument. A five-point Likert scale was used in this study. The questionnaire was adapted from several previous studies. Partial Least Squares using smart PLS are used to perform data analysis. PLS analysis is carried out by evaluating measurement models and structural models and testing hypotheses.

RESULTS

The total number of respondents who participated in this study is 205. From the demographic data, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are women. More than 73% of respondents have undergraduate education. More than 50% of respondents earn

between IDR 1,000,000 – IDR 10,000,000. Table 1 shows the results of the demographic measurements.

Table 1. Demography Respondent

Variables		n	Percentage
Gender	Male	95	46,34
	Female	110	53,65
Age	<20	12	5,85
	21 - 30	170	82,92
	31 - 40	10	4,87
	41 - 50	5	2,43
	51 - 60	3	1,46
	>60	5	2,43
Education	High school	23	11,21
	Diploma	1	0,5
	Undergraduate	151	73,65
	Postgraduate	24	11,70
	Doctoral	6	2,92
Income	<IDR 1.000.000	62	30,24
	IDR 1.000.000 – IDR 5.000.000	90	43,90
	IDR 5.000.000 – IDR 10.000.000	37	18
	>IDR 10.000.000	16	7,80

Outer Model Evaluation

This study evaluated the outer model through convergent, discriminant validity, and composite reliability values. To be free from the convergent validity problem, an indicator must have a loading value above 0.7. In this study, almost all loading values were above 0.7. There is only one indicator that has a value of less than 0.7. However, because the AVE value for all indicators is above 0.5, indicators with a value less than 0.7 are maintained. Discriminant validity was tested by comparing the outer loading value with the cross-loading value. To be free from discriminant validity problems, the outer loading value must be higher than the cross-loading value. The test results show that the outer loading value of all variables is higher than the cross-loading value. So, it can be concluded that there is no discriminant validity problem. Reliability is tested based on the value of composite reliability. The expected composite reliability value is above 0.7. So there is no reliability problem.

Inner Model Evaluation

In general, PLS is predictive. Therefore, there are no specific criteria to test the model's accuracy. Referring to Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2014) to obtain a robust model, can be seen from the value of R². The estimation results show that the R² values are 0.772 and 0.928. Therefore, it is concluded that the model formed is quite good. Table 2 shows the results of the outer and inner models.

Table 2. Evaluation Summary

VARIABLE		CL	PEQ	SQ	FQ	RI	AVE	CR	R2
CL	CL1	928	713	706	725	771	0.831	0.952	0.772
	CL2	899	764	703	774	786			
	CL3	931	743	728	817	808			
	CL4	887	741	650	759	835			
PEQ	PEQ1	633	780	672	637	696	0.700	0.903	
	PEQ2	714	867	715	722	760			
	PEQ3	710	811	776	768	789			
	PEQ4	655	884	679	717	746			
SQ	SQ1	723	723	876	785	856	0.740	0.919	
	SQ2	490	670	849	659	659			
	SQ3	718	775	887	797	816			
	SQ4	657	753	825	624	758			
FQ	FQ1	738	731	675	835	771	0.684	0.928	
	FQ2	676	747	689	849	829			
	FQ3	552	643	609	712	709			
	FQ4	781	677	766	828	781			
	FQ5	751	718	720	900	784			
	FQ6	671	714	698	828	729			
RI	RI1	671	751	687	849	829	0.623	0.891	0.928
	RI2	552	643	609	712	709			
	RI3	888	746	656	763	842			
	RI4	723	723	876	785	856			
	RI5	595	673	758	536	694			

Hypothesis test

In this study, three hypotheses were formulated. The following sections will discuss the results of hypothesis testing. Hypothesis 1 consists of 3 sub hypotheses. Hypothesis 1a predicted that service quality as an important dimension of experience quality significantly affects restaurant image. The calculation results show that service quality positively and significantly affects restaurant image ($t = 7.588$; $\beta = 0.330$). Hypothesis 1a is accepted. Hypothesis 1b predicts the effect of food quality on restaurant image. The calculation results show that hypothesis 1b is accepted ($t = 7.974$; $\beta = 0.472$). The impact of physical environment quality on restaurant image is formulated in hypothesis 1c. The test results show a significant positive effect of physical environment quality on restaurant image. Hypothesis 1c is accepted. The impact of restaurant image on consumer loyalty is formulated in Hypothesis 2. Statistical testing shows that restaurant image significantly positively affects consumer loyalty ($t = 36.972$; $\beta = 0.877$). Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

The mediating role of restaurant image is formulated in hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c. Based on the mediation analysis test, it was found that restaurant image provides a significant mediating role in the influence of the dimensions of experience quality on loyalty. This means that Hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c are accepted. Table 3 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	Remarks
H1a	SQ -> RI	0.330	7.588	Supported
H1b	FQ -> RI	0.472	7.974	Supported
H1c	PEQ -> RI	0.213	4.150	Supported
H2	RI -> CL	0.877	36.972	Supported
H3a	SQ -> RI -> CL	0.290	7.680	Supported
H3b	FQ -> RI -> CL	0.414	7.534	Supported
H3c	PEQ -> RI -> CL	0.186	4.191	Supported

DISCUSSION

This research generally answers two research objectives. The first research objective is to examine the causal relationship between the quality of experience, restaurant image and customer loyalty. The second research objective is to examine the mediating role of restaurant image on the effect of experience quality on consumer loyalty. The following is a discussion of the research results.

This study reveals that service quality positively influences the formation of a restaurant's image. The results showed that the better the quality of service provided by the restaurant, the preferable the image of the restaurant. This is in line with the research conducted by Hapsari, Clemes, and Dean (2017), which explains the vital role of service quality in restaurant image. As well as service quality, food quality as an essential dimension of the quality of experience has a positive influence on the formation of a restaurant's image. The better the quality of food served by a restaurant, the better the image of the restaurant. The effect of food quality on restaurant image is in line with the research of Ali et al. (2020), which also explains the important role of food quality on restaurant image. As an aspect seen directly by consumers, the quality of the physical environment of a restaurant plays an important role in creating a positive image. These results strengthen the research conducted by Wu, Cheng, Chen and Hong (2018), which explains the important role of physical environment quality in enhancing the image of a restaurant. It is obvious that the quality of the experience gained by consumers, mainly based on service quality, food quality and physical environment quality, plays an essential role in creating a positive image of a restaurant. Therefore, restaurant managers must always provide a quality experience for their customers in order to build a positive image.

As a result of quality experiences, this study shows that restaurant image plays an important role in creating customer loyalty. This research indicates that ethnic restaurants with a good image will have loyal customers. The important role of restaurant image on consumer loyalty strengthens the previous study which also found an important role of an image on loyalty. As a determinant of consumer loyalty, this study also found that restaurant image has a mediating effect on the quality of experience dimensions of loyalty. This means that indirectly, the quality of experience will also increase consumer loyalty by improving the restaurant's image.

CONCLUSION

Derived from the research conducted there are several conclusions can be drawn. First, the quality of experience has an important influence on enhancing the image of an ethnic restaurant. The better the experience gained by ethnic restaurant consumers, the better

the image of the restaurant. Second, it can be concluded that to increase consumer loyalty, ethnic restaurants need to create a good image. The more positive the image of the restaurant, the higher the loyalty of consumers. Finally, it can be concluded that in addition to influencing restaurant image on loyalty, this variable also provides a mediating role that bridges the influence of the quality of experience on loyalty.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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