

Examining the Influence Mechanism of Customer Perceived Food Authenticity and Loyalty in the Ethnic Restaurant: Cultural Identity as a Moderation

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Abstracts

The paper examines the structural relationships of customers' authenticity perception on satisfaction and loyalty in the ethnic restaurant, cultural identity as moderation. A survey was conducted and the structural equation modeling analysis method was adopted. The research displays the following results: the perception of authenticity has significant direct impact on satisfaction and loyalty. The perception of authenticity has indirect impact on loyalty through satisfaction as well. And the directly effect on destination is more significant than indirect effect. Cultural identity has moderation between perceived authenticity and satisfaction. In order to realize the sustainable development of the ethnic restaurants, this paper put forward some suggestions: grasp the dimension of customers' perception of authenticity and improve the satisfaction and loyalty of ethnic restaurants; maintain the authenticity, realize the cross - local operation of ethnic restaurants; highlight the sense of cultural identity and strengthen the "taste of hometown" in ethnic restaurants.

Key words: Ethnic restaurant; Perceived food authenticity; Satisfaction; Loyalty; Cultural identity

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, more and more products are becoming homogeneous, and some fake and shoddy products are also prevalent. Consumers are more eager for authentic products and services. The value of consumers changed, and begun to pursue authentic experience. Authenticity, also means "reality", "genuine", "sincere", "ethic", was discussed in the tourism research. It also stands for regional culture, landmarks and images that can identify the image of a place or company. In the past years, people's awareness of cultural diversity and the pursuit of authenticity have grown rapidly, and the demand for authentic and unique experiences has grown rapidly (Gilmore, et al, 2007). The customers want to experience ethic food and broaden cultural knowledge (Molz, 2004) to pursue authenticity (MacCannell, 1976). Ebster and Guist (2004) stated that the customers wanted to experience authentic culture in ethic restaurant. The opinion of the restaurants according to the meal, in and outside surrounding and atmosphere (Lu, 2012). The authenticity of the food is the main attribute influencing the customer experience. The operates often use local decoration, music, dresses and related cultural factors to create authentic dinning surrounding. Most of them focus on the food authenticity and suitable for the local culture (Liu and Jang, 2009; Tsai and Lu, 2012; Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011). In the existed literatures, most focus on the quality research, the quantity research is rare.

Since 1990s, research about loyalty and satisfaction were introduced in the tourism industry. Amounts of research identified the factors influencing loyalty including motivation, service quality, perceived value (Ha and Jang, 2010), decision preference. And satisfaction as a mediation to loyalty directly and indirectly. The perception of the authenticity is rare, from the perspective of food is even less.

This study explores the influencing factors of food authenticity perception from the perspective of consumers, and constructs structural equation models of food authenticity perception, cultural identity and consumer satisfaction, and loyalty. Taking ethnic restaurants with local characteristics as an example.

1. RESEARCH THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES

1.1 The Perceived Food Authenticity

The theory of authenticity originated in museum studies, referring to the authenticity of artworks (Trilling, 1972). In 1970s, Researchers have introduced the term “authenticity” into the field of tourism sociology to study tourist motivation and experience (MacCannell, 1973). There are objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and postmodern authenticity (Wang, 1999). The objectivist judges authenticity based on authenticity and originality, and believes that “unreal objects will produce unreal experiences, not even copies.” emphasis “always true.” Some researchers criticized objective authenticity; stated authenticity couldn’t be confirmed objectively. Different from objective authenticity, the constructive authenticity stated that authenticity is not pure or objective, but simple, negotiative, relied on the contexts. The object is considered to be true, not because of the original, but of personal interpretation and belief. At last, the postmodern authenticity stressed the experience, and “hyper-authenticity” is put forward.

The food authenticity is regarded as re-constructed authenticity, authenticity is not only objective, it is combination of objective and subjective. People perceived the authenticity based on how they perceive and interpreted what they see. Cohen (2004) stated, the food authenticity include preparation, presentation and consumption. Ha and Jang (2010) introduced the food authenticity including food and atmosphere. More researchers think that food authenticity including atmosphere, food and service (Zeng, Liu, and Liu, 2013). Based on the previous research, the current study confirm atmosphere, service and food as the attributes to measure perceived authenticity, with Likert scale 5 points.

1.2 The Perceived Food Authenticity, Loyalty and Satisfaction

Customers’ perception of authenticity in a restaurant can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. The authenticity perception of food can meet the expectations of specific visitors, thereby increasing their satisfaction

(Kim and Eves, 2009). Zeng et al (2013) stated that food, atmosphere and service were the main factors influencing customer satisfaction. Huang (2013) introduced that the environmental perception of tourists to ancient villages had a positive and significant impact on tourist satisfaction. Zhang (2013) also put forward that tourists’ evaluation of the authenticity of minority buildings has a strong positive correlation with satisfaction. Generally speaking, higher evaluation of authenticity results greater satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is argued:

H1: Perceived food authenticity directly and positively influences customer’s satisfaction

Food is considered to be an attraction for the destination (Fields, 2002). The food authenticity is the main characteristics of food culture of ethnic restaurants; it can enhance the customers’ identity of the local food. Perceived authenticity can result the repeat visit and positive word mouth. Therefore, the following hypothesis is argued:

H2: Perceived food authenticity directly and positively influences customer’s loyalty.

In the previous study, satisfaction can influence loyalty. Through research on tourists from many tourist destinations, Yoon and Uysal (2005) found that tourist satisfaction has a significant positive impact on tourist loyalty. And as mediation, satisfaction is the main factors of loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is argued:

H3: Satisfaction directly and positively influences customer’s loyalty.

H4: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived food authenticity and loyalty.

1.3 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to the process by which individuals or groups converge emotionally and psychologically, that is, the individual’s perception and belief of the group or category to which they belong (Yin and Zheng, 2017). Culture can combine individuals with different backgrounds into a whole new group, and they will have a strong sense of identity with each other. Therefore, the interaction between different members will definitely break the narrowness of the nation and promote mutual recognition. Some people travel to seek cultural differences while others travel for cultural identity. Cultural differences can satisfy tourists’ psychology, but cultural identity can reduce the conflict between tourists and local residents, can better understand the local food culture, and improve satisfaction (Light, 2001). The diet of ethnic restaurants has a certain regional, national, and special characteristics. If consumers have a certain sense of national culture, it will increase tourists’ satisfaction with ethnic restaurants, and then increase tourist loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is argued:

H5: Cultural identity moderates the relationship between perceived food authenticity and satisfaction.

To sum up, based on the previous literature, an hypothetical model is proposed in this research (Figure 1).

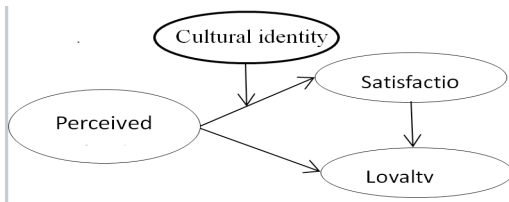


Figure 1
Conceptual model

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Setting

Yanji City is the capital of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in Jilin Province, and is the center of political, economic, cultural and foreign exchanges in the whole state. It is located in the east of Jilin Province, in the middle of Yanbian Prefecture, and at the northern foot of the Changbai Mountains. Yanji City is an open frontier city with Korean ethnic characteristics. It is known as the “Home of Song and Dance”. Everyone can dance and hear good news everywhere. Yanji is a paradise for gourmets and shoppers. Jindalai cold noodles “, charcoal-fired barbecue, pickled pickles and other flavors make people appetite, Japanese and Korean products, ethnic ornaments make people linger; Yanji City is also a city inhabited by Koreans in China. The long-established Chinese Korean folk culture and folk food constitute a different kind of scenery, which is well-known both at home and abroad, and has been named the Chinese Korean food base and the Chinese Korean supplies base. In 2017, Yanji received more than 10 million tourists from home and abroad, and realized tourism revenue of 24.5 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 14.9% and 20.6%. Due to its proximity to North Korea, Yanji’s many North Korean restaurants attract many tourists to experience North Korean specialties.

Table 1
Scale Items From the Literature

Factors	Items	Resources
Perceived food authenticity (PFV)	The overall style of the restaurant looks authentic.	Lu (2012), Zeng (2014)
	The decoration of the restaurant looks ethnic.	
	The architecture and tableware of the restaurant have national characteristics.	
	I tasted authentic food here.	
	The name of the food in the restaurant is ethnic.	
	The dishes in the restaurant are authentic.	
	I enjoy the authentic experience and service provided by this restaurant staff.	
Satisfaction (S)	This restaurant’s employees are from ethnic regions.	Oliver (1993)
	The staff at this restaurant looks ethnic.	
Loyalty (L)	Are you satisfied with this meal?	Lu, Gursoy and Lu (2015), Giese and Cote (2000)
	I would recommend Grandma Yuan to others. I will come back for dinner with Grandma Yuan.	

Yuanma Grandma Baofan began in 1999 with a mission to inherit the Korean diet. There are 16 stores in Yanji. The interior decoration of the shop is very Korean. The main dishes are: Baofan, Mingtai Fish Soup, Hot Chicken Feet, Slate Tofu and so on.

Through recommendations from public comment sites and group purchase sites such as Meituan, Grandma Yuan Baofan has been enthusiastically promoted by consumers as a characteristic theme restaurant operating Korean cuisine. Therefore, this study uses Yanji Yuan’s grandmother to make rice as a research site, and studies the customer’s authenticity perception and its impact.

2.2 Research Sample

This study used two sets of data. The first set of data was tested on the authenticity scale. This study was conducted mainly in a public university in Guangdong Province. 230 students participated in online and classroom surveys. For consumer data, the questionnaire method was used to collect the data. During the 11th National Day of 2019, the research team issued a questionnaire near Yuanji Grandma Restaurant in Yanji, mainly aimed at consumers who entered the restaurant for dinner. After 7 days of investigation, a total of 470 questionnaires and 456 valid questionnaires were issued, and the effective rate was 97%.

The respondents (N =456) were 49.6% female. In terms of age group, 41.2% were below 40 years old, and 85.5% had an education of university degree or above. The month income under 6000 yuan were 58.7%.

In the previous study, scholars focusd in three aspects: surrounding, food and service (Zeng G.J., Sun S.Z., 2016).All the items of the perceived food authenticity and cultural identity were measured by a 5-point Likert scale from ‘strongly disagree (=1)’to‘strongly agree (=5)’.

2.3 Data Analysis

2.3.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

To be continued

Continued

Factors	Items	Resources
	I appreciate Korean food culture.	
Cultural identity (CI)	Tasting Korean food makes me feel comfortable.	
	Tasting Korean cuisine makes me feel that I have achieved my self-worth.	

In order to ensure the reliability of the scale, 230 college students were pre-investigated, and the consistency of the scale (Cronbach's Alpha value) was measured and analyzed using SPSS 20.0 software. The data obtained was 0.944, which was greater than 0.7, indicating that the data could be used. Reliability is high; in terms of data validity, the correlation coefficient between the three measurement items of the authenticity scale and the total of the measurement items is between 0.890 and 0.912, and the correlation between the two measurement items of loyalty and the total of the items The coefficients were 0.896 and 0.920, respectively, and both were significantly correlated at $p < 0.01$ levels. It can be seen that the measurement scale has good content validity.

2.3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Model

In order to measure the fit of the model, AMOS 19.0 software was used for analysis. The goodness-of-fit indices of the measurement models were higher than the recommended values, indicating that the measurement model has a high adaptability. The standardization factor load of each measure of authenticity, loyalty, and cultural

identity ranges from 0.775 to 0.900, which is greater than 0.5, and reaches a significant level at $p < 0.001$. The AVE value of the authenticity is 0.770, the AVE value of the loyalty is 0.653, and the AVE value of the cultural identity is 0.693, both of which are above 0.5, indicating that the observed variables have a strong average interpretation ability for the latent variables and the model has good convergence Validity. The credibility of authenticity is 0.944, the CR value of loyalty is 0.790, and the CR value of cultural identity is 0.918, which are all greater than 0.7, indicating that the measurement items can explain the latent variables more consistently, and the measurement model has good reliability.

2.3.3 Structural Equation Model Analysis

The structural equation model is tested. The chi-square value is 51, the degrees of freedom are 18, $p = 0.000$, and the ratio of the chi-square to the degrees of freedom is 2.83, which is in the range of 1-5. The commonly used model fitting index meets the standard, indicating that the model is well adapted, and the degree of fitting between the sample data and the conceptual model is high (Table 2).

Table 2
Index of Goodness-of-fit

Fitting index	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	PCFI
Recommended value	<5	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08	> 0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5
Model value	2.83	0.941	0.901	0.071	0.967	0.987	0.984	0.562

2.3.3.1 Basic Model

Through analysis, the path relationships between perceived food authenticity and satisfaction and loyalty are all significant at the level of 0.1% (H1: $p < 0.001$; H2: $p < 0.001$) (as shown in Table 3), assuming that both H1 and H2 are supported. The explanatory degree of R2 of the dependent variable loyalty is 0.076, indicating that 7.6% loyalty can be explained by the path coefficient of the model.

2.3.3.2 Mediation Model

According to Table 3, in the mediation model, satisfaction has a significant positive effect on loyalty, H3 is

supported. Satisfaction plays a part of mediating between perception food authenticity and loyalty. H4 is supported. In this model, the interpretation of R2 is 25.3%, which indicates that the overall interpretation of the model is higher after the mediating effect of satisfaction is added.

2.3.3.3 Moderation Model

The path relationship of cultural identity as a moderator is significant ($p < 0.01$), assuming H5 is supported. Moreover, after adding the adjustment variables, the interpretation degree of food authenticity perception R2 is 31.3%, which indicates that the model of cultural identity as the adjustment variable has a higher interpretation of perception food authenticity.

Table 3
Path Analysis of Structural Model

Paths	Basic model		Mediation model		Moderation model	
	Path	T-value	Path	T-value	Path	T-value
PFV-->S	0.324***	7.099	0.326***	7.047	0.326***	6.596
PFV-->L	0.285***	5.521	0.132*	2.362	0.092	1.754
S-->L			0.445***	8.679	0.382***	6.834
PFV×CI-->S					0.135**	2.912
R2	0.076		0.253		0.313	

Notes: "*" $p < 0.05$; "***" $p < 0.01$; "****" $p < 0.001$

3. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to understand the influence of customers' perception food authenticity on restaurant satisfaction and loyalty, and the moderating role of cultural identity between the perception food authenticity and satisfaction. A structural equation model was constructed from the perception food authenticity. After empirical research, all hypotheses were supported. Firstly, customers' perception food authenticity is divided into three dimensions: surrounding, food and service. Service has the most significant impact on the perception of authenticity, followed by food and the surrounding, which is different from previous studies by scholars. In the travel experience, the perception of the authentic surrounding of the destination is the primary factor affecting the perception of tourists (Zeng, Li, and Liu, 2014). In the study of ethnic food culture; it is believed that tourists are not blindly pursuing the authenticity of food due to the cross-local cultural fusion. As a service industry, the catering industry should pay more attention to the authenticity of the service, which is similar to the authenticity of the stage (Zeng, et al. 2014). Secondly, satisfaction has a direct and significant impact on loyalty, and customers' perception of the authenticity of food has an indirect effect on restaurant loyalty through restaurant satisfaction. That is, satisfaction plays a mediating role between authenticity and loyalty. This is consistent with satisfaction as a pre-variable that affects loyalty. Lastly, Cultural identity plays a moderating role in the perception of food authenticity and satisfaction, which shows that the stronger the sense of identity in a place, the more obvious the impact of food authenticity perception on satisfaction. Consumers are always looking for catering companies that are in line with their own values and diet views. This not only meets the physical needs, but also meets the psychological needs of consumers, and even thinks that their value has been realized. Because people tend to realize themselves in convergence. The results of this study have certain significance in the related theories and practices of factors affecting consumer dietary behavior.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Theoretical Significance

The present paper studies the authenticity perception of customer cuisine, which is a further enrichment of the authenticity theory. In previous studies, most scholars have explored the authenticity from the perspective of tourism, and rarely discuss the authenticity of cuisine. At the same time, there are many controversies about the authenticity of cuisine. Many scholars explore authenticity from various authenticity perspectives. This article uses constructivist authenticity as the theoretical basis to explore the authenticity of cuisine, which is in line with

the characteristics of ethnic restaurants. At the same time, the concept of cultural identity has not been added in previous studies. The rise of food tourism, many tourists travel for food, there are usually two situations, one is to seek differences, the other is to seek common ground, but in food, food culture has local characteristics, consumers have food habits It is also difficult to change. Consumers agree that local culture will increase their perceived value and then their satisfaction.

4.2 Practical Significance

The present studies conduct empirical research on specific ethnic restaurants and can suggest some development ideas for managers. For example, customers' perception of the authenticity of food has a more direct impact on loyalty than an indirect effect. Satisfaction only plays a part of the mediating effect, indicating that the retention of authenticity has a stronger impact on loyalty. On the other hand, it is found through research that the authenticity of the service has a more significant impact on the perception of authenticity than the authenticity of food, indicating that catering companies should inject more authenticity factors into the service, such as hiring local service personnel, following Local service customs. At the same time, when marketing and propaganda, businesses should highlight their own cultural connotations and emphasize the locality of food culture.

4.3 Suggestions

Based on the above analysis, in order to achieve the sustainable development of ethnic restaurants, we should proceed from the following three aspects.

Firstly, grasp the dimension of consumers' perception of authenticity and improve the satisfaction and loyalty of ethnic restaurants. The dimensions of consumers' perception of authenticity include environment, food and services. After investigation and research, services have the greatest impact on authenticity perception. For ethnic restaurants, consumers first come into contact with the service staff, and their clothing and language must have ethnic characteristics. A good first impression will make consumers truly feel authentic and consider the restaurant authentic. Secondly, the food to be tasted must have national characteristics. The naming of food, utensils, raw materials, etc. must reflect the authenticity. For Korean restaurants, typical dishes such as laver, rice noodles, and bibimbap must be available. Finally, the layout of the environment should also reflect the national style, such as background music and restaurant decoration design should be consistent with the theme. Only when consumers perceive authenticity and authenticity can they increase their satisfaction and loyalty to ethnic restaurants.

Secondly, maintain authenticity and realize cross-local operation of ethnic restaurants. Authenticity has a great impact on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. If catering companies want to achieve chain and cross-

local operations, they must retain the connotation of authenticity. Cross-local operation does not mean giving up authenticity. The vitality of ethnic restaurants lies in their nationality and characteristics. In order to realize the chain development of ethnic restaurants, first of all, in terms of the choice of waiters, we should hire people from ethnic regions, and conduct a full range of training in clothing, language and services; secondly, in the selection of ingredients, we should also use ingredients of origin 3. Hire a chef from the place of origin for cooking, from the selection of ingredients to the preparation of dishes to the enjoyment of food, all should reflect the national character. Finally, from the perspective of the environmental layout, the style of the place where the ethnic restaurant is located should be completely copied. Only in this way can the originality be maintained and the cross-local chain operation of ethnic restaurants is realized.

Lastly, highlight cultural identity and strengthen the “hometown flavor” of ethnic restaurants. Cultural identity will affect consumer satisfaction with ethnic restaurants, and consumers will always look for restaurants that are consistent with their values. People are the product of culture. Individuals have a sense of belonging and attachment to the groups they live in, such as their hometown and nation. After research and analysis, cultural identity will mediate the role of food authenticity perception and satisfaction. Therefore, as a national restaurant, it is necessary to strengthen the cultural characteristics, highlight the sense of cultural identity, make consumers feel kind and have a “hometown taste”.

4.4 Limitation

In order to ensure the conciseness of the model, this study only studies the relationship between customers' perception of food authenticity and satisfaction and loyalty, without considering the relationship between food authenticity perception and other factors. At the same time, the article only introduces cultural identity as a moderating variable; in fact, there are many factors that affect satisfaction and loyalty, such as the type of customer, whether it is a local resident or a tourist. These may have a moderating effect on this model. More adjustments can be added in future research. Variables and intermediary variables to enrich the theory of authenticity.

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