



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY ON VALUE, CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION TOWARDS NYONYA
RESTAURANTS IN MELAKA, MALAYSIA***

NG CHIEN YING

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By

NG CHIEN YING

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science**

October 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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October 2017

Chair: Muhammad Shahrin Ab Karim, PhD
Faculty: Food Science and Technology

Nyonya cuisine has been garnering more national attention due to its unique taste. The popularity of the cuisine spurred the growth of Nyonya restaurants in Melaka, a state declared as a UNESCO World Heritage. This study intended to identify how perceived authenticity of food, atmospherics, and service employees influenced customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and future behavioural intentions towards Nyonya restaurants. The mediating roles of perceived value and customer satisfaction were also examined. Lastly, the moderating effect of familiarity with Nyonya restaurants on the relationships between perceived authenticity dimensions, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions were investigated.

A convenience sampling was carried out at two Nyonya restaurants in Melaka whereby self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the customers. A total of 336 usable responses were used for data analysis. The proposed structural model of this study was tested following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach: a measurement model and a subsequent structural model. Using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, this study discovered that positive perception of food authenticity was statistically significant in inducing higher perceived value, greater customer satisfaction, and positive behavioural intentions. Service employee authenticity was a significant antecedent of perceived value. Perceived value was found to affect behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction. In addition, perceived value acted as a partial mediator in the relationship between food authenticity and customer satisfaction and a full mediator in the relationship between service employee authenticity and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction also served as a partial mediator between food authenticity and behavioural intentions.

The results of chi-square difference test indicated that the relationships among perceived authenticity dimensions, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions were significantly different according to customer familiarity levels with Nyonya restaurants. In particular, the statistical tests disclosed that the moderating function of familiarity existed in the relationships between: (i) atmospherics authenticity and perceived value; (ii) food authenticity and customer satisfaction; (iii) atmospherics authenticity and customer satisfaction; (iv) atmospherics authenticity and behavioural intentions; (v) service employee authenticity and behavioural intentions; and (vi) perceived value and behavioural intentions. The findings provided important implications for selecting and refining the critical authenticity aspects of Nyonya restaurants in order to increase perceived value, enhance customer satisfaction, and eventually intensify positive behavioural consequences. Unlike previous studies on restaurant authenticity, this study exclusively investigated the effects of perceived authenticity from the aspects of food, atmospherics, and service employees on customers' post-dining behaviours in Nyonya restaurants. This study could also offer directions to improve customers' perceived authenticity which can thus enrich their dining experience.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**KESAN-KESAN PERSEPSI KEASLIAN KE ATAS NILAI, KEPUASAN
PELANGGAN DAN NIAT TINGKAH LAKU TERHADAP RESTORAN
NYONYA DI MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

Oleh

NG CHIEN YING

Oktober 2017

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Makanan Nyonya memang telah mendapat sambutan yang menggalakkan dari dalam negara kerana rasanya yang serba unik. Populariti makanan ini telah memacu pertumbuhan restoran Nyonya di Melaka, sebuah negeri yang dinobatkan sebagai Tapak Warisan Dunia UNESCO. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana persepsi mengenai keaslian makanan Nyonya, persekitaran, dan pekerja-pekerja perkhidmatan boleh mempengaruhi persepsi nilai, kepuasan pelanggan, dan tingkah laku pelanggan pada masa hadapan di restoran Nyonya. Peranan persepsi nilai dan kepuasan pelanggan sebagai mediator juga telah diuji. Akhir sekali, fungsi kebiasaan dengan restoran Nyonya sebagai moderator dalam perhubungan antara dimensi-dimensi persepsi keaslian, persepsi nilai, kepuasan pelanggan, dan niat tingkah laku juga dikenalpasti.

Persampelan mudah dijalankan di dua buah restoran Nyonya di Melaka dimana borang soal selidik yang ditadbir sendiri diedarkan kepada pelanggan-pelanggan di restoran tersebut. Sejumlah 336 borang soal selidik telah diterima dan digunakan untuk analisis data. Model struktural yang dicadangkan dalam kajian ini akan diuji berdasarkan pendekatan dua langkah yang dikemukakan oleh Anderson and Gerbing (1988) iaitu: satu model pengukuran dan seterusnya satu model struktural. Dengan menggunakan teknik permodelan persamaan struktural (SEM), kajian ini mendapati bahawa persepsi keaslian makanan yang positif adalah secara statistiknya signifikan dalam mendorong persepsi nilai yang lebih baik, kepuasan pelanggan yang lebih tinggi, dan niat tingkah laku yang positif. Aspek keaslian pekerja-pekerja perkhidmatan juga mempunyai perkaitan yang positif dan signifikan dengan persepsi nilai. Persepsi nilai didapati dapat mengundang niat tingkah laku melalui kepuasan pelanggan. Di samping itu, persepsi nilai juga bertindak sebagai mediator

separa dalam perhubungan antara keaslian makanan dan kepuasan pelanggan, serta sebagai mediator penuh dalam ikatan antara keaslian pekerja-pekerja perkhidmatan dan kepuasan pelanggan. Kepuasan pelanggan turut berperanan sebagai mediator separa antara keaslian makanan dan niat tingkah laku.

Keputusan ujian perbezaan chi-square menunjukkan bahawa perhubungan antara dimensi persepsi keaslian, persepsi nilai, kepuasan pelanggan, dan niat tingkah laku adalah berbeza secara signifikannya berdasarkan pada tahap kebiasaan pelanggan dengan restoran Nyonya. Khususnya, ujian-ujian statistik memperlihatkan fungsi kebiasaan sebagai moderator wujud dalam perhubungan antara: (i) keaslian persekitaran dan persepsi nilai; (ii) keaslian makanan dan kepuasan pelanggan; (iii) keaslian persekitaran dan kepuasan pelanggan; (iv) keaslian persekitaran dan niat tingkah laku; (v) keaslian pekerja-pekerja perkhidmatan dan niat tingkah laku; dan (vi) persepsi nilai dan niat tingkah laku. Dapatan kajian ini mempunyai implikasi penting dalam pemilihan dan penapisan aspek keaslian restoran Nyonya yang kritikal dalam usaha untuk meningkatkan persepsi nilai, kepuasan pelanggan, dan akhirnya memperkasakan niat tingkah laku yang positif. Berbeza dengan kajian-kajian terdahulu yang berkait dengan keaslian restoran, kajian ini menyiasat kesan-kesan keaslian dari sudut makanan, persekitaran, dan pekerja-pekerja perkhidmatan keatas tingkah laku pelanggan selepas mereka menjamu selera di restoran Nyonya. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan cara-cara untuk meninggikan persepsi pelanggan terhadap keaslian yang seterusnya dapat memperkayakan pengalaman makan mereka.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 11 October 2017 to conduct the final examination of Ng Chien Ying on her thesis entitled "Effects of Perceived Authenticity on Value, Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention Towards Nyonya Restaurants in Melaka, Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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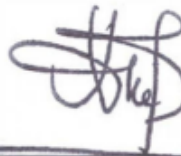
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Atmospherics Authenticity
AFD	Asymptotic Distribution-Free Estimator
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BC	Bias-Corrected
BIs	Behavioural Intentions
CI	Confidence Interval
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Composite Reliability
CS	Customer Satisfaction
EM	Expectation-Maximisation Algorithm
EPC	Expected Parameter Change
FA	Food Authenticity
FIML	Full Information Maximum Likelihood
GH	Gamma Hat
GOF	Goodness-of-Fit
LB	Lower Bound
LV/LVs	Latent Variable/Latent Variables
MI/MIs	Modification Index/Modification Indices
MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimation
MVA	Missing Value Analysis
OV/OVs	Observed Variable/Observed Variables
PV	Perceived Value
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEA	Service Employee Authenticity
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SIE	Standardised Indirect Effect
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SQ	Service Quality
SR/SRs	Standardised Residual/Standardised Residuals
SRMR	Standardised Root Mean Square Residual
UB	Upper Bound
VIF	Variance-Inflation Factor

LIST OF SYMBOLS

α	Cronbach's Alpha
β	Standardised Coefficient
D^2	Mahalanobis Distance
df	Degrees of Freedom
f^2	Effect Size
Δ	Increment of Change
n	Sample Size
ns	Not Statistically Significant
p_{BS}	Bootstrapping p -Value
r	Correlation Coefficient
r^2	Squared Correlation Estimate
R^2	Coefficient of Determination
t	Student's t Distribution
χ^2	Chi-Square(d)
χ^2/df	Relative Chi-Square
$A \leftrightarrow B$	Correlation
$A \rightarrow B$	Effect of A on B
$A \leftarrow B$	Effect of B on A



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief background of Nyonya restaurants in Melaka and the current issues that they are facing. The gaps which are not adequately addressed by past research are covered in the problem statements of this chapter. The chapter also discusses research objectives, scope and significance of the study, outline of the thesis, and operational definitions of the concepts which are central to the research.

1.2 Background of the Study

On 8th July 2008, Melaka was declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The award is bestowed on Melaka owing to the singular blend of local and foreign heritages which among them are *Peranakan*, Portuguese, Dutch, and British. *Peranakan* is a community descended from the earliest Chinese immigrants who came to the Malay Archipelago, married the natives, and emulated the local way of life. The early history of *Peranakan* settlement entitles the people to embody the genuine local heritage of Melaka (Leong, 1997). Although the community is still striving to preserve their distinct identity, the localised *Peranakan* culture bears a significant role in the heritage representation of Melaka (Worden, 2010).

By means of cultural borrowing and innovation, *Peranakans* succeeded in adapting the Chinese food to its local surroundings, thus bringing the Nyonya cuisine into existence. The cuisine is in a distinctive gastronomic realm all of its own - with specific and subtle nuances of tastes and flavours. The prefix 'Nyonya' is used to denote that the cuisine was a creation of the *Peranakan* womenfolk (Tan, 2007). The cuisine has gained considerable fame in the international scene through the Penang asam laksa, Malaysia's sole entry into CNN International food survey where it was ranked seventh in the list of world's fifty most delicious foods (Cheung, 2011).

The recognition of Melaka by the world will unquestionably increase the value of the state and spur surge in tourist arrivals. Currently, tourism is a big revenue contributor to the economy of Melaka. In 2015, the state attracted 15.737 million domestic and international tourists. The majority of them were from Asian nations such as Singapore, China, and Indonesia (Data Asas

Negeri Melaka, 2015). Tourist arrivals augmented by 704,829 or 4.69% in 2015 compared to the 15.032 million tourists during the same corresponding period in 2014.

Table 1.1: Top 15 countries sources of visitors to Melaka

Country	2014	2015
Malaysia (domestic)	10,846,706	11,270,392
Singapore	1,272,190	1,471,048
China	750,101	879,050
Indonesia	486,536	591,324
Taiwan	135,532	137,490
Japan	145,438	129,753
Vietnam	125,675	111,573
Hong Kong	96,288	104,354
Thailand	79,117	91,614
South Korea	62,454	61,138
Australia	49,881	58,155
United Kingdom	32,942	40,487
The Netherlands	8,186	34,268
United States of America	25,899	28,555
France	20,965	28,238
Germany	25,170	27,278

Due to the escalating number of tourists and the expanding tourism industry, the role of Malaysia's gastronomy is becoming more prominent than ever. Over the years, the recognition of culinary tourism has amplified and it is seen as a valuable asset that tourism sector has to offer. Even though there are instances in which tourists are wary of the local food or even find them repugnant, the cuisine remains a critical and competitive advantage for Malaysia's destinations (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As a result, restaurants in Melaka thrive continuously to serve a growingly diverse customer base of local and foreign travellers with a distinctive culinary experience.

Commodification of Nyonya cuisine began in the 1980s. Since then, Nyonya restaurants have been increasing at a steady pace. The restaurants in Melaka are frequented by both local and foreign visitors owing to the fact that the cuisine is synonymous with Melaka. The rise in arrival of tourists with every passing year has significantly aided in the proliferation of Nyonya restaurants which is imperative to culinary tourism (Jalis, 2017). Based on a thorough information search using food and travel websites like Malaysia Most Wanted Food, FoodAdvisor, and TripAdvisor, the total number of Nyonya restaurants and cafés was estimated to be around 200 and they are concentrated in Melaka (50), Penang (30), Kuala Lumpur (34), and Selangor (58).

From the total, there are around 20 Nyonya restaurants which adhere to halal standards and half of them can be found in Melaka. The non-halal character of these Nyonya restaurants means that their customers are primarily non-Muslims. It is noteworthy to mention that more than half (61.3%) of the population in Malaysia are Muslims based on the statistics provided by Department of Statistics Malaysia (2011). Therefore, the number of prospective customers is restricted to local Chinese, Indians, minority groups, as well as foreign visitors.

In the past, Nyonya cuisine is a culinary tour de force which is confined within the boundaries of Nyonya households and their communities. The cuisine requires extensive gastronomic skills and long preparation hours. Thus, it seems to be an unlikely candidate for restaurant production. In spite of the fact, Nyonya fares manage to break out of its domestic periphery owing to their resourceful creators. The growth of Nyonya establishments marks the transition of Nyonya cuisine into commercialisation. This also means that the role of the food has changed from being a main cultural aspect of celebrations and a symbol of wealth into a mean to propagate a fading culture (Luebe & Hanafi, 2014).

Nyonya restaurants can in some ways assist in the government's endeavour to promote tourism through proper strategy and execution. According to Chatzopoulou, Gordon, and Kuznesof (2016), these restaurants are capable of functioning as cultural ambassadors by providing native food, among other things, to expose inexperienced tourists to their local culture and people. In this time and age, tourists and local connoisseurs are widely known for their endless quests in seeking uniqueness through dining experiences. As mentioned by Chatzopoulou et al. (2016), ethnic restaurants (i.e., restaurants that offer food of ethnic minority groups rather than that of the majority) are the second most influential embodiment of a foreign culture after mass media. Therefore, Nyonya restaurants can act as a perfect vassal in arousing interest in the *Peranakan* food culture.

Besides the point that ethnic restaurants provide an excellent environment to learn different cultures, the dishes may also offer recipe ideas for food aficionados who become acquainted with the cuisine and attempt to produce it in ordinary households. Moreover, a few Nyonya restaurants in Malaysia have taken the initiatives to conduct cooking classes to satisfy the curiosities of local or foreign tourists alike. In the diverse culinary world, it is not difficult for food to diffuse through the porous borders (Alvera, 2013) and bridge cultural barriers. Food can therefore epitomise culture in a sort of way.

Although more and more Nyonya restaurants are slowly paving their way into other states such as Johor and Perak, they are facing tough competition from the larger mainstream ethnic restaurant segment (e.g., Malay, Chinese, Indian,

and Mamak restaurants). Moreover, the trend of globalisation has caused an influx of foreign ethnic restaurants (e.g., Thai, Arab, Korean, Japanese, and Italian). Appadurai (1996) deduced that the increment of foreign restaurants in Malaysia has changed the customers' consumption decision, causing restaurant business to become progressively competitive. Indeed, globalisation has increasingly exposed people to a wide range of ethnic cuisines, leading them to develop a penchant for experimenting with diverse ethnic flavours. Moreover, fast-food restaurants chains offer value meals which can pose a challenge to the pricier Nyonya restaurants.

Nevertheless, authenticity of the cuisine sold at ethnic restaurants will permit customers to experience and perhaps even to relate with the 'true foreignness' of an ethnic group (Lu & Fine, 1995). Many researchers (e.g., Ebster & Guist, 2004; Lu & Fine, 1995; Molz, 2004) have agreed that authenticity is an attribute appreciated by customers and that it can be evaluated from different aspects of a restaurant (i.e., food, atmospherics). Hence, it is not surprising that Mohammad and Chan (2011) alleged that the concern for authenticity within a certain social context has multiplied over the last decades and the vigorous pursuit of authenticity is considered one of the major trends in tourism.

1.3 Problem Statements

Despite the charm of Nyonya cuisine, it is still rather obscure in the international culinary scene as people who are in search for exciting new tastes have somewhat failed to notice it (Chen, 2015). Therefore, there is a huge potential for the cuisine to be marketed to the mass with focus on the cuisine's authenticity. Customers consider authenticity as a priceless attribute as it exemplifies the unique characteristics of a culture which are tantamount to ethnic restaurants. According to Potter (2010), the interest in authenticity is one of the most compelling movements in modern-day life and accordingly, it has a profound effect on consumer behaviour. Thus, the prime motivation of this study is to determine if greater perceived authenticity in Nyonya restaurants leads to more positive behaviours among customers.

In general, researches on the marketing aspects of Nyonya restaurants in Melaka are rare, if not non-existent. Also, in spite of the prominence of authenticity as a competitive advantage, studies on the impact of customers' perceived authenticity on their dining experience in the ethnic restaurant context are scant and they were mostly conducted abroad (i.e., typically on Chinese and Korean restaurants in the United States). Moreover, most researches on dining experience use fundamental restaurant attributes (e.g., service quality) as their main focus (Jang, Liu, & Namkung, 2011; Jang, Ha, & Park, 2012).

Few studies have demonstrated that perceived authenticity did have a certain impact on customers' post-dining responses (Jang et al., 2012; Liu & Jang, 2009a, 2009b). Nevertheless, the effects of authenticity studied were mainly concerned about food and atmospherics factors and rarely on human factor; and more often than that, the aspects were tested independently (Jang et al., 2011, Wang & Matilla, 2013). In response to these problems, this research attempted to probe the concurrent effects of the three aspects of customers' perceived authenticity on their post-consumption behaviours. These behaviours refer to behaviours that arise after the consumption of the product or service, namely perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions (Tsotsou & Wirtz, 2011).

Relationships between the four critical service management variables, specifically perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions were widely studied in various hospitality and tourism settings: airlines, cruise, hotel, golf, and leisure and cultural tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009; Oh, 1999; Petrick, 2004a). Nevertheless, limited efforts have been spent to explore the interconnected relationships among these four constructs with emphasis on perceived authenticity which is useful in broadening the current understanding of consumer behaviour in ethnic restaurants. Also, little research has considered both perceived value and customer satisfaction as mediators (Han & Ryu, 2009).

Moreover, the literature on quality and post-consumption behaviour evaluations appears to have disregarded the likelihood that customers might take past dining experiences into consideration before making their post-dining evaluations (Söderlund, 2002). The author has also noted that researches on past experiences are likely to disregard the equally crucial post-consumption evaluations. According to Belk (1975), situational factors can greatly affect customers' intentions towards diverse services. Various researchers (e.g., Meiselman, 1996; Lim & Razzaque, 1997) have also established that dining situation is a crucial but much neglected compartment in comprehending restaurant consumer behaviour. Therefore, it is not startling that relatively few restaurant studies have addressed the issue of how familiarity levels affect post-consumption evaluation processes (Bowden, 2009).

In response, Namkung and Jang (2009) have indirectly recommended that a thorough examination of familiarity as a moderator is highly required. Besides, Bitner (1992) has implied that the strength and direction of the linkages between customers' cognitive/emotional responses, and their ensuing behaviours, were moderated by situational factors. Based on these arguments, the role of familiarity in Nyonya restaurants was addressed in this study as customers' authenticity perceptions and their post-consumption behaviours could vary with familiarity.

When contemplating perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions as consequences of perceived authenticity, there are possibilities that the interrelationships among the concepts may differ across familiarity levels due to the different framework of reference for evaluations (Ha & Jang, 2010). In low familiarity customers, their evaluations are less critical or extreme due to their rudimentary cognitive structures (e.g., beliefs about product attributes).

As their familiarity increase, they begin to develop more complex and refined cognitive structures following a snowballing number of product-related experiences (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Sequentially, these structures enable consumers to process product-related stimuli more effectively when they come across the products in the future (Owens & Hausknecht, 2007). Given this rationale, it is possible that familiarity – one of the most powerful situation factors (Bitner, 1992) can affect customers' post-consumption behaviours towards a restaurant. As the manner in which familiarity and authenticity interact to alter consumer behaviour is still unclear, this study aimed to bridge the gap by investigating how the interactions between the dimensions of perceived authenticity and familiarity levels of customers affect customers' post-consumption behaviours.

1.4 Research Objectives

General Objective

The research aimed to answer the question of how restaurateurs can improve post-consumption behaviour among customers through perceived authenticity. To allow the restaurateurs to be capable of making more informed decisions, various aspects of perceived authenticity were utilised. Self-regulation theory was employed to explore the links between perceived authenticity aspects and different post-consumption behaviours; namely perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions.

Specific Objectives

In order to realise the general objective, this study specifically investigate the following:

1. The relationships between dimensions of perceived authenticity (i.e., food authenticity, atmospherics authenticity, and service employee authenticity) and post-consumption behaviours (i.e., perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions) at Nyonya restaurants.
2. The mediating role of perceived value in the relationships between perceived authenticity dimensions, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions.

3. The mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationships between perceived authenticity dimensions, perceived value, and behavioural intentions.
4. The moderating role of familiarity in the relationships between dimensions of perceived authenticity, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions at Nyonya restaurants.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Using Bagozzi's (1992) theory of self-regulation, the purpose of this study was to relate the aspects of perceived authenticity to behavioural intentions for customers at Nyonya restaurants in Melaka, as mediated by perceived value and customer satisfaction and moderated by familiarity. The independent variable, perceived authenticity would be generally defined as customers' subjective evaluation of authenticity based on the food, atmospherics, and service employees of the Nyonya restaurants.

The dependent variable, behavioural intentions would be defined as customers' intents towards the Nyonya restaurants in the future. The first mediator, perceived value is defined customers' overall assessment of the net worth of their dining experience at the Nyonya restaurants based on their perceptions of the restaurant quality received and the money paid. Customer satisfaction, the second mediator is the customers' level of affective fulfillment with the dining experience at the Nyonya restaurants. Lastly, the moderator familiarity would be defined as customers' perceived amount of knowledge concerning the Nyonya restaurants.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this current study have key contributions that would be of interest to academicians of food service and hospitality management, managers and restaurateurs of Nyonya restaurants, and the *Peranakan* culture. This study is vital as it adds insights into the current body of knowledge relating to the experiences of Nyonya restaurants' customers. This study could contribute meaningfully to academics in three ways. Firstly, literature on hospitality management has largely considered service quality as an indispensable antecedent of post-consumption responses. Thus, this study intended to enrich the literature by substituting the quality construct with perceived authenticity in the framework proposed by Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000). That being said, the interrelationships between perceived authenticity, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions could be investigated.

Since experiences with Nyonya restaurants can assist in engaging tourists more actively with the destination (i.e., Melaka), a conceptual framework which incorporates all the aforementioned concepts could present an improved understanding of the patrons' behaviours in Nyonya restaurant setting. In addition to that, this research studied the role of familiarity as moderator. Investigating this moderator would be very beneficial towards attaining a more profound comprehension of how the relationships between perceived authenticity and post-consumption behaviours differed between familiar and unfamiliar customers of Nyonya restaurants.

Thirdly, a considerable amount of hospitality studies adopted a Western-oriented outlook. Accordingly, the researches were conducted at the ethnic restaurants of the Western world which are highly developed and turning mainstream. The findings of this study were therefore anticipated to enhance the dining knowledge as well as culinary tourism experiences in the context of emerging local ethnic restaurants, principally Nyonya restaurants. Nyonya cuisine is still very much a regional cuisine and not very widespread throughout Malaysia.

As the efforts to study the effects of authenticity by researchers in a local context were minimal, a study that highlighted perceived authenticity of customers could offer effective operational and marketing approaches for Nyonya restaurants, increasing their probability of success. At present, Melaka is progressively implementing marketing strategies to promote its tourism. Thus, the findings of this current study are expected to assist restaurateurs, state tourism office, and government tourism agencies by offering meaningful understandings of consumer behaviour so that they can devise culinary tourism strategies on a market-driven basis. Subsequently, Melaka could compete more effectively with other culinary destinations in Malaysia by offering memorable dining experiences to visitors.

Last but not least, authenticity of Nyonya cuisine is an important aspect in the preservation of the nation's culinary heritage and the *Peranakan* culture. However, increasing commoditisation in cultural products could in one way or another diminish authenticity as they are contrived to please customers. This study therefore intended to demonstrate that perceived level of authenticity of Nyonya restaurants' qualities were relevant in enhancing visitor's experience by acquainting customers to the region and the *Peranakan* culture as well as its heritage.

In a way, this study attempted to portray the importance of sustaining a cultural heritage which is an indispensable tool for tourism product differentiation (Cuccia & Cellini, 2007) in the hope that restaurateurs can present the *Peranakan* cuisine without compromising its authenticity. This effort can then leverage this food heritage and culinary assets to an international scale,

revitalising Nyonya cuisine and bringing increased recognition to the cuisine, and perhaps even assisting in positioning Melaka as a culturally distinctive destination.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

This study consists of five chapters. A literature review is presented in Chapter 2, alongside the hypotheses related to the conceptual model employed in the research. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and is followed by the presentation of the results and analysis as well as the discussion of the results in Chapter 4. The last section, Chapter 5 summarises the study, addresses both theoretical and managerial implications, highlights the limitations of the research, and finally offers recommendations for future research.

1.8 Operational Definition

Food Authenticity: Customers' subjective evaluation of authenticity based on the food presentation, taste of the food, side dishes/accompaniments and cooking methods at the Nyonya restaurants.

Atmospherics Authenticity: Customers' subjective evaluation of authenticity based on the external appearance, interior design, furnishings, table settings, decorations, and menu design of the Nyonya restaurants.

Service Employee Authenticity: Customers' subjective assessment of authenticity based on the attributes of the service employee, namely their spoken language, their attire, and their background at the Nyonya restaurants.

Perceived Value: Customers' overall assessment of the net worth of their dining experience at the Nyonya restaurants based on their perceptions of the restaurant quality received and the money paid.

Customer Satisfaction: Customers' level of affective fulfillment with the dining experience at the Nyonya restaurants.

Behavioural Intentions: Customers' intents towards the Nyonya restaurants in the future, specifically their plans to return, recommend to family and friends, intentions to frequent, spread positive word-of-mouth, and willingness to pay more.

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