Perceived quality, authenticity, and price in tourists' dining experiences: Testing competing models of satisfaction and behavioral intentions

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Preprint / Preprint
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Perceived Quality, Authenticity and Price in Tourists' Dining Experiences:

Testing Competing Models of Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions

Abstract

This study examines tourists' dining experiences and tests competing models of predictors of satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Specifically, we examine the influence of service quality, quality of environment, food quality, price fairness, authenticity and tourist satisfaction on behavioral intentions. Within the context of mountain hut casual ethnic restaurants and a survey of 304 respondent tourists, we apply PLS-SEM to test both the baseline and the competing, hierarchical latent model. First, results for the baseline model show that satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between the various quality attributes and behavioral intentions. Second, results from the competing model confirm that food quality, service quality and quality of environment form a second-order construct of perceived quality. Third, results reveal that service quality, quality of the environment, and food quality are best represented as a second-order construct in modelling predictors to evaluate the tourism dining experiences relative to tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Fourth, we show that authenticity is a stronger predictor of satisfaction than price fairness and service quality.

Key Words: tourists' dining experiences, perceived quality, authenticity, price, customer satisfaction, behavioral intentions, PLS-SEM, hierarchical latent model

Introduction

Understanding how tourists experience food and dining is essential for a restaurant's success because favorable experiences lead to higher customer satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions (Han and Ryu, 2009; Namin, 2017; Walls et al., 2011). For mountain tourism destinations, mountain hut restaurants can be an important contributor to the destination's attractiveness. With their unique setting and rustic atmosphere, mountain restaurants can serve as sociocultural attractors playing a key role for the destination's product innovation (Kuščer, 2013). Thus, managing tourists' dining experiences has become a key marketing priority for restaurant managers to attract and retain customers (Kim et al., 2017; Oh and Kim, 2017). Ultimately, to gain competitive advantage, restaurant managers have to recognize experience management as a crucial part of their strategy (Chen and Huang, 2016; Hanks et al., 2017).

Despite this consensus, tourists' dining experiences are complex to understand. Complexity arises as food evokes an individual's primitive emotions related to eating. Hence, more sophisticated cognitive and intellectual aspects associated with fine dining (Been Zeev, 2000). Studies show that tourists' frequent exposure and deep knowledge about food make a difference in dining experiences' evaluation (Goolaup et al., 2018). Further, tourists' assessment of dining experiences are context-bound. Tourists assess experiences differently for each restaurant context (casual vs. fine dining) and situation (dining alone vs. dining with others) (Illouz, 2009). Yet, for some of these settings, experiences remain rather unexplored. Bausch and Unseld (2017) point out that the extant literature often depicts tourist experiences in alpine settings overly simplified, and an understanding of tourists' dining experiences within the unique outdoor mountain tourism environment is rather missing.

Moreover, although it is clear that service quality, quality of environment, food quality, price fairness, and authenticity positively influence tourists' behavioral intentions (Han and Hyun, 2017; Liu and Jang, 2009) there is disagreement in the extant literature on the relationship between the three factors: service quality, environmental quality, and food quality. Baxter (2009) highlights that often constructs might explained with different conceptualizations, and for the quality construct in the tourist experience, competing explanatory models exist (Prayag et al., 2015), too. Thus, there is a need to explore if factors carry equal weight in the consumer's mind (Walls et al., 2011); for example, it is unclear if authenticity has a stronger influence on tourist's satisfaction than price fairness or service quality.

Thus, it can be assumed that service quality, environmental quality, and food quality may also form a second-order factor, yet, this assumption needs to be empirically verified (Jang and Namkung, 2009). A second-order model tests whether the hypothesized higher-order factor sufficiently accounts for the relationship patterns between the first-order factors and provides a more parsimonious as well as an interpretable model (Nunkoo et al., 2017). Further, a second-order factor must be related to other predictors to ascertain its value (Chin, 1998). Additionally, it remains unclear whether a second-order factor of perceived quality has an influence on authenticity, satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Given these research gaps, the main objectives of this study are 1) to understand tourists' dining experiences in a unique rural mountain tourism setting and, 2) to test competing models of behavioral intentions that propose a second-order factor of perceived quality and its relationship with authenticity and satisfaction. By doing so, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationships and inter-relationships between food quality, environmental

quality, service quality, price fairness, authenticity, and their effects on post-consumption behaviors such as satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Next, we review the pertinent literature.

Theoretical framework

Tourist Dining Experiences in Mountain Huts

Mountain huts are ethnic restaurants in alpine regions, which were initially established near hiking trails to provide shelter and offer basic food and accommodation (Bätzing, 2015). Mountain huts serve as tourist attraction; and food and dining experiences in these ethnic restaurants can serve to connecting tourists and the local culture (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). This way, mountain huts have an important role in enhancing tourists' overall destination experiences (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017). So far, however, the tourism literature has disregarded this dining context despite the potential and the uniqueness of mountain hut restaurants to act as sociocultural attractors (Kuščer, 2013). We argue that an understanding of tourist experiences in this setting is necessary, since mountain huts can play a major role as a destination's key attraction. Understanding of what constitutes tourist experiences in these unique rustic mountain huts is even more relevant as understanding tourists' food and dining experience has gained momentum due to an increase in global demand in food tourism (e.g., Andersson et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016).

Additionally, from a destination marketing supply-side perspective, alpine destinations need to diversify their traditional winter sport products – due to the effects of climate change. Alpine destinations need to prepare and expand their activity and attraction portfolios. This is specifically important for the Austrian alpine context, which is discussed in this paper. Here studies have already highlighted that future snow scarcity will impact on the geography of the Austrian Alps – and consequently will affect nature-based winter tourism (Steiger, 2011). Subsequently,

sustainable diversification of the brand portfolio and integrating local food, form key areas to increase a tourist destination's product portfolio.

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Dining experiences include "a set of complex interactions between subjective responses of the customer and objective features of the product" (Chang, 2013: 50). It is widely accepted that guests evaluate consumption experiences holistically. To explain the behavioral responses that result from dining experiences the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is used (e.g., Kim et al., 2011). TRA suggests that by identifying certain factors that are relevant to an experience, the behavioral intentions as indicators of a customer's decision to take an action can be predicted (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1997). According to TRA, consumers' assessment of the experience occurs through evaluating information about the relevant factors that affect their decision. Changing antecedent factors can subsequently predict behavioral change in consumption behavior (Sheppard, et al., 1988).

Importantly, a tourist's 'Reasoned Action' includes the assumption of 'volition' as the central argument. Volition refers to the thought process of being in control and decide (Madden et al., 1992). The customer's reasoned action is explained to result from a person's volitional control and a conscious decision. According to TRA individuals act rationally when "salient information or beliefs about the likelihood of performing a particular behavior will lead to a specific desired outcome" (Madden et al., 1992: 3). In other words, some specific signaling information combined with the beliefs to be in control will logically influence tourists' attitudes and lead to predictable behavioral intentions – and actual behaviors.

Yet, despite this model being successfully adapted to predict dining experiences (Kim et al., 2011; Ryu and Han, 2010), studies have critiqued and highlighted the limitations of TRA. Sheppard et al. (1988) criticize that the model does not capture situational factors and hence is too generalist. Further, it can be argued that individuals might not follow the logic that is embedded in TRA with respect to the consumer's decision-making process. Human behavior is often irrational, especially if situational factors vary. Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory explains why attitudes can change – and the change of attitude does not follow a logic that could have been anticipated beforehand. Cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals perceive multiple diverging cognitions, and subsequently, are challenged to decide their next action (Elliot and Devine, 1994). Ong et al. (2017) recently pointed out, that in behaviors related to food cognitive dissonance often occurs. Often, consumers 'reflexive' eating habits compete against the wish of healthy and ethical attitudes towards food.

Standardization–Authenticity-Paradox

When explaining tourist dining experiences, it is important to address the problem of 'standardization–authenticity-paradox' proposing that standardized design and authentic experiences are mutually exclusive (Zeng et al., 2012). On the one hand, consumers are seeking individual, personalized, innovative, and affordable services, yet on the other hand, consumers are looking for authentic and non-standard–experiences. This conflict is particularly true for restaurants that "have become stages in which experiences are enacted, performed and valued" (Rickly and McCabe, 2017: 55) and make it complex for managers to understand if authenticity leads to actual positive behavioral intentions. Second, there is an argument that authenticity is context-bound and differs from place to place (Bujisic et al., 2014; Hanks et al., 2017). Context-bound authenticity might be connected with the idea that authenticity is socially constructed and

created individually, thus authenticity perceptions and value differ for each tourist (Mkono, 2012) and for each restaurant setting. Hence, the need arises to test authenticity in different settings to understand how consumers ascribe such perceptions. Hanks et al. (2017) examine differences in perceptions on density and service for three different types of restaurants. They find tourists' observations of staff responsiveness and empathy were different for each type of restaurant. The problem is, that until now, there is a very limited understanding of these contextual differences and more context-bound evidence is necessary. These differences along with other discriminators such as price (fine-dining or budget self-service), service level, theme (e.g., sports bar, indoor or outdoor), local or ethnic cuisine, buffet-style or table service (Hanks et al., 2017) have a further impact on authentic and service quality perceptions in restaurants.

Perceived quality as a second-order construct

Perceived quality has been defined as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988: 3). Further, Zeithaml (1988) explains that in contrast to actual quality, perceived quality is different, due to its higher level of abstraction, an inclusion of the customer's holistic overall assessment of the dining experiences. Importantly, the measurement of perceived quality is found on the premises that customers form their perceived quality assessment mostly through a recall of various aspects of the overall experience. Following these premises, we conceptualize perceived quality within the dining experience as the overall assessment of all relevant perceived positive accumulated aspects of food quality, service quality and quality of environment, which subsequently form the second-order construct of perceived quality.

When measuring perceived quality, we argue, it is particularly useful to approach it as a second-order construct. "In comparison to first-order models with correlated factors, second-order factor models can provide a more parsimonious and interpretable model when researchers hypothesize that higher order factors underlie their data" (Chen et al., 2005: 427). Second-order models have been successfully used when several related constructs have been measured by multiple indicators (Nunkoo et al., 2017). Advantages of second-order models include that they enable researchers to explain relationships between first-order and second-order factors and second-order models reduce measurement complexity, e.g., when compared with multi-trait-multi-method models (Chen et al., 2005). Despite these acknowledged advantages of a second-order construct Nunkoo et al.'s (2017) study is one of the few studies that recently introduced this technique to service quality research.

Hypothesis development and conceptual model

Food quality is one of the core determinants of tourists' dining experiences and a major influencing factor of customer satisfaction and post-dining behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2017). Attributes used to test food quality include presentation, tastiness, menu item variety, nutrition, healthy options, freshness and ambiance factors, e.g., temperature and noise levels (Han and Ryu, 2009; Namkung and Jang, 2007). Previous research testing the relationship between quality attributes, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions either model a direct relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions–or they use customer satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between quality attributes and behavioral intention. Several other studies include additional mediators to analyze the relationship between food quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, such as image perceptions, customer perceived

value (Ryu et al., 2012), or emotions (Jang and Namkung, 2009). The consensus is that satisfaction mediates the relationship between food quality and behavioral intentions. Han and Hyun (2017) confirm the positive relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction, and between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. For casual dining ethnic restaurants, Ha and Jang (2010) confirm direct effects between food quality on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, Namin (2017) confirm food quality, service quality and price-value ratio have the largest impact on customer satisfaction, which is a significant predictor of behavioral intentions. Based on this review of the literature, we posit:

H1a: Food quality has a positive effect on satisfaction.

H1b: Food quality has a positive effect on behavioral intentions.

Service quality directly influences satisfaction (Han and Hyun, 2017) and behavioral intentions (Ha and Jang 2010; Su et al., 2016). For example, Su et al. (2016), identify strong links between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer company identification, which positively influences repurchase intention and customer well-being. Studies indicate however, that the relationship of high service quality and customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions depends on the type of restaurant and the customer segment. Bujisic et al. (2014) point out that the relationship between service quality and return intention/word of mouth is not linear for different restaurant types (quick-service, midscale, and upscale). In an experimental design, they test for different service quality levels (below average, average, and above average) finding that for upscale restaurants customer return intentions only increase when they provide an above average service. Namin's (2017) reveal for fast-food restaurants that service quality does not directly encourage customers to revisit – satisfaction only serves as a mediator. In contrast, Qin and Prybutok (2009)

confirm a significant positive effect of service quality on behavioral intention in fast food restaurants among college students. Overall, the literature confirms the importance of high service quality delivery and positive effects on satisfaction and behavioral intentions. However, it is also clear that perceptions of service quality and its consequences depend on restaurant context (e.g., Bujisic et al., 2014). Based on these findings, we test for both relationships with satisfaction in an alpine hut casual restaurant setting:

H2a: Service quality positively influences customer satisfaction

H2b: Service quality positively influences behavioral intentions

Quality of environment determines the restaurant's image and influences customers' perceived value which, influences satisfaction levels and behavioral intentions (Han and Hyun, 2017; Ryu et al., 2012). Han and Ryu (2009), for example, find that décor, artifacts, spatial layout and ambient conditions affect price perception, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. For full service restaurants, they unveil that price perception completely mediates the effects of spatial layout and ambient conditions on customer satisfaction. Jang and Namkung (2009) note that atmospherics foster positive emotions and intentions to revisit, to recommend, or to talk positively about the restaurant. Based on the above discussion we propose:

H3a: The quality of the environment positively influences customer satisfaction

H3b: The quality of the environment positively influences behavioral intentions

Price fairness is a consumer's perception if the set price is reasonable and acceptable and is a determinant of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Liu and Jang, 2009). Price fairness relates to the customers' perceived quality and their evaluation of fairness/price-value

ratio. Customer satisfaction is higher, when service quality is high than resulting in the customer's perception of getting greater value for the price paid (Jin et al., 2012; Namin, 2017). Whilst most studies agree that perceived price fairness leads to higher customer satisfaction, Qin and Prybutok's study (2009) is one of the few that does not measure a significant relationship between satisfaction and the price-value ratio, which might be due to the sample of college students that this study has used. Price fairness also has a direct impact on behavioral implications. Han and Ryu (2009) state that price perception is a mediator between spatial layout/ambient conditions and customer satisfaction, confirming a direct significant path from price perception to customer loyalty. Interestingly, Liu and Jang (2009) identified a significant effect of a 'fair price' on customer satisfaction but not on behavioral intentions. Thus, we propose:

H4a: Perceived price fairness positively influences customer satisfaction

H4b: Perceived price fairness positively influences behavioral intentions

Authenticity plays a major role in customers' experience, leading to satisfaction and/or positive behavioral intentions (Liu et al., 2018). Authenticity is a key pull-factor for mountain tourist destinations where consumers seek authentic, rustic experiences in their activities (Andersson et al. 2016; Bausch and Unseld, 2017). Authenticity "functions to interlace notions of originality, genuineness, symbolism, encounter and experience" (Rickly and McCabe, 2017: 55). Yet, despite this agreement on the importance of authenticity as an antecedent to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions remain of important unresolved issues around measuring and evaluating authenticity remain. Based on this, for the context of mountain hut casual restaurants we consider authenticity of food, atmosphere, and menu presentation as influential items for satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Although most of the literature relates authenticity only to

customer satisfaction, we test also for a direct influence on behavioral intentions, in the specific context of mountain tourism and casual ethnic mountain hut restaurants.

H5a: Authenticity positively influences customer satisfaction

H5b: Authenticity positively influences behavioral intentions

Customer satisfaction is the main antecedent for customers' loyalty (Chen and Chen, 2010; Zeithaml et al., 1988). Satisfied customers will return while dissatisfied customers often engage in negative word of mouth (Chen and Chen, 2010; Prayag et al., 2017). The criticism however is, that customer satisfaction is similar to service quality and the two concepts are closely linked, and often the two terms are used interchangeably (Cronin et al., 2000). González et al. (2007: 154) explain, the difference between the constructs is that "customer satisfaction results from individual and global transactions, whereas service quality involves a general impression of the superiority or inferiority of the service provider and the services". In this study, customer satisfaction is treated as a cognitive and affective evaluation of the overall dining experience as it is known that a consumer's dining experience comprises cognitive thought processes and human's instinctive and primitive emotions (Been Zeev, 2000). In this case, service quality is regarded as an antecedent of satisfaction and is based on customer's judgment of superiority of the service (Zeithaml, 1988).

Behavioral intentions include the customer's plans to return, to recommend, and to generally communicate positive about the restaurant (Namin, 2017). Although Dolnicar et al. (2015) challenged the link between satisfaction and behavioral intentions, the majority of researches confirms the positive link between a satisfied tourist and positive behavioral intentions (Prayag et al., 2017; Zabkar et al., 2010). Moreover, satisfaction mediates and positively influences consumers' behavioral intentions (Namin, 2017). Interestingly, within the restaurant context, it is

unclear if all dimensions of the experience display mediating effects. For example, Namkung and Jang (2007) found, satisfaction only has a partially mediating role in the relationship between food quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Thus, we propose:

H6: Customer satisfaction is positively related to behavioral intentions

Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual model, which has been developed to indicate the relationships between these variables and to test the proposed hypotheses.

<<insert Figure 1: Conceptual Model about here >>

Method

Measurement tools

Measurements for each construct are adopted from existing scales used in previous studies. Food quality is measured by using seven items including food presentation, variety, healthy options, taste, freshness, temperature, and drink taste (Namkung and Jang, 2007; Liu and Jang, 2009; Hwang and Zhao, 2010). For the dimension service quality, we use seven items, based on previous studies (Liu and Jang, 2009; Ryu et al., 2012); friendly and courteous employees, prompt service, helpful employees, employees have knowledge of the menu, waiting time, food is served as ordered, and employees provide an accurate guest check. Quality of environment is measured using five items; 'room temperature' and 'noise level' adapted from Han and Ryu (2009) and interior design, 'cleanliness' and 'neat and well-dressed employees' from Liu and Jang (2009). Price fairness is measured as price fairness of (1) food, (2) drink, and (3) value for money (Jin et al., 2012). For authenticity, we use the attributes 'atmosphere' and 'food authenticity' retained from Liu and Jang (2009), further the item 'authentic menu presentation' was included.

Satisfaction is tested with three items: "I am satisfied with my experience at this restaurant", "I am pleased to have visited this restaurant", and "I really enjoyed myself at this restaurant" (Liu and Jang, 2009; Namkung and Jang, 2009). Behavioral intention is measured through three items, previously tested in the dining context by Namin (2017), Namkung and Jang (2009), Liu and Jang (2009). Their measures were originally adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996): "I would like to come back to this restaurant in the future", "I would recommend this restaurant to my friends or others", and "I would say positive things about this restaurant to others".

The scales for quality attributes, price fairness, and authenticity anchored from "very poor" (=1) to "excellent" (=5). To test satisfaction and behavioral intentions the endpoints of the scale were "strongly disagree" (=1) and "strongly agree" (=6). Forced-choice scales, without a mid-point have been adopted to measure satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Instead of uneven scales, forced-choice scales are beneficial as the respondents need to make a choice and decide on their level of agreement or disagreement on the respective question (Chyung et al., 2017). Already in 1950, Cronbach suggested that the "satisfactory experience with forced-choice tests should encourage their continued widespread use, especially suited in with psychological items" (Cronbach, 1950: 10) – and latest research that tested nature-based tourist experiences also adopted this scale to elicit forced-choice decisions in tourists (Moyle et al., 2017).

Respondents were asked to provide socio-demographic information (age, home country, and gender) and information about the travel behavior (frequency of visits, companions, overnight guest, or day tripper, and accommodation). The questionnaire was designed based on a comprehensive review of the literature, reviewed by an academic expert, and pre-tested with tourists from five mountain restaurants. As a result, minor amendments in questionnaire design were made. Since the respondents had to rate all variables in one questionnaire common method

variance could be an issue. Following Podsakoff et al. (2003), we thoroughly developed the questionnaire and conducted the interviews. To reduce the method bias at the reporting stage we assured respondents of their anonymity and that there are no 'right and wrong' answers, and asked them to answer honestly. In addition, we use different scale formats for the predictor and criterion measures and separated the criteria measures graphically from the predictor measures in the questionnaire.

Sample design, data collection and analysis

Target population were tourists of three mountain hut casual restaurants in skiing areas in Austrian. Restaurants represent 'typical' Tyrolean mountainous rural destination settings. Restaurants can be described as casual ethnic restaurants mainly serving traditional local Tyrolean cuisine in a rustic atmosphere in an alpine environment. This specific context and the restaurants were chosen for three reasons. First, the mountain hut restaurants present an original ethnic environment, second, tourism serves as a major source of income in this region, third the selected mountain huts are successful restaurant businesses, that contribute to both preserving the ethnic environment and add to economic wealth in their respective areas. We identified respondents through convenience sampling and approached them after they finished their meal. The survey took place in February 2016. Of the 320 tourists approached at the huts, 308 were interviewed. Of these, four interviews had to be discarded, leading to a response rate of 95%.

The theoretical model is tested using Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM). This method is more suitable for exploratory models given that the method copes well with small samples and issues of non-normality (Hair et al., 2014). Further, PLS-SEM has increasingly become and innovative an accepted method in tourism and hospitality research. For example, according to Ali et al.'s (2018) most recent review shows, there has been increasing interest and usage of variances

based structural equation modeling techniques as PLS-SEM in hospitality research between 2001 and 2015. In addition to the advantage of the exploratory nature, the appropriateness for small samples, an additional advantage of PLS-SEM is, that it allows for the inclusion of both, reflective and formative variables. For our study, PLS-SEM enables to estimate a competing model: a hierarchical model where food quality, service quality and quality of environment form the second-order construct "perceived quality". The first-order constructs (dimensions of perceived quality) are measured reflectively and the second-order construct (perceived quality) formatively. All other constructs are measured reflectively.

As a general rule of thumb, the necessary sample size for covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) is defined by a lower bound of 10 observations per variable (Nunnally, 1967), implying around 310 observations for our study. In PLS-SEM, the sample size requirements are lower with the rule of thumb being the minimum sample size should be 10 times the maximum number of arrowheads pointing at a latent variable anywhere in the PLS path model (Hair et al., 2017). Consequently, we consider the sample size as adequate given that a maximum of five arrows is pointing at any latent variable in Figure 1. Yet, the normality criterion is not met, which is another key assumption of CB-SEM. PLS-SEM does not require normal distribution since "parameter estimation in PLS is essentially carried out by a sequence of OLS regressions, which implies that no assumptions regarding the distribution or measurement scale of observed indicators are required" (Reinartz et al., 2009, 332-333). Skewness statistics for all variables in the dataset ranged from -1.6 to -0.16 and kurtosis statistics from 2.37 to 5.45. Tests on univariate normality indicate that normality can be rejected for each variable and since univariate normality is a necessary condition for multivariate normality we infer that our data does not fulfill the assumption of a multivariate normal distribution. PLS-SEM is robust to violations of normality, which implies that

no assumptions regarding the distribution or measurement scale of observed indicators are required (Reinartz et al., 2009). SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) is used in this study to estimate the models.

Results

Sociodemographic profile of sample

Women and men are equally distributed in the sample. Most of the respondents (44%) were between 30-49 years old, followed by the age group 18-29 (30%) and 50-64 (21%). 50% of the respondents were from Germany and tourists from the Netherlands (16%), Switzerland (10%) and Austria (9%). Other respondents came from Great Britain and Denmark (each around 4.5%), a small percentage from France, Sweden, Poland, South Africa, Australia, the U.S., and the Czech Republic. Around 57% of respondents were overnight tourists and the rest day trippers. Respondents were most likely to visit the mountain hut casual restaurants in the company of others (family, friends, children, or partner) – only 1.32% of respondents visited alone.

Outer model (measurement model)

Initially, the measurement model was tested for reliability and construct validity. We assessed factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2016). The respective results are presented in Table 1. Factor loadings exceed the recommended value of 0.7, except the items "Variety of items on the menu", "Healthy options", and "Accurate guest check". After removal, the CR and AVE increase slightly and indicate a good convergent validity: AVE of all constructs ranges between 0.669 and 0.922, which is above the suggested value of 0.5; and CR values exceed the threshold value of 0.7 in all cases.

Discriminant validity is the degree to which the constructs are distinct to each other. We use two approaches to assess the constructs' discriminant validity. First, we compare the square root of the variance extracted of each construct to the correlation with other factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Second, we follow Ali et al.'s (2018) suggestion and apply a relatively new approach to test discriminant validity in variance based SEM, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). It has been shown with a Monte-Carlo simulation that the HTMT ratio of correlations outperforms the classic Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 2 displays the discriminant validity. The table shows the square root of the AVE the square root of the AVE on the diagonal and correlations off the diagonal. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest adequate discriminant validity when the square root of the AVE is larger than the corresponding correlations, which is fulfilled for every construct indicating adequate discriminant validity according to this criterion. Table 2 further shows the HTMT ratio. Henseler et al. (2015) define a threshold value of 0.9, meaning that discriminant validity could be an issue when the HTMT values are larger than 0.9. In our study, most of the constructs exhibit discriminant validity according to this criterion—except the constructs satisfaction and behavioral intentions display a HTMT value slightly greater than 0.9. Examining the confidence interval which is constructed using the bootstrapping procedure implemented in SmartPLS with 5000 resamples we find that the empirical 95% confidence interval does not contain the value 1 indicating sufficient discriminant validity according to Henseler et al. (2015). To investigate discriminant validity in more detail Table 3 presents cross loadings of each item on other constructs for values larger than 0.7. An inspection of cross loadings shows that several variables load on more than one factor, however, loadings are highest for the conceptualized factor. This is also true for the critical distinction

between the constructs satisfaction and behavioral intention and suggests sufficient discriminant validity between those two constructs.

<< insert Table 1: Measurement Model Assessment about here>>

<< insert Table 2: Discriminant Validity about here>>

<< insert Table 3: Cross Loadings about here>>

Inner model structural estimates for the baseline model and hypotheses testing

Results of the structural model are presented in table 4. One criticism on PLS-SEM is the missing of standard goodness-of-fit statistics. But there exist several criteria to assess the model's quality like the coefficient of determination (R^2), cross-validated redundancy (Q^2), path coefficients, and the effect size (Hair et al., 2014). The adjusted R^2 shows that 75.1%, respectively 72.5% of the variation in satisfaction and behavioral intention can be explained by the model. The Q^2 assesses the inner model's predictive relevance and is obtained using the blindfolding procedure. A value larger than zero means that the model has predictive relevance. The Q^2 equals 0.615 (satisfaction), respectively 0.652 (behavioral intention). The cross-validated redundancy measure Q2 is derived from the blindfolding procedure with an omission distance of seven.

To test the hypothesized relationships between the constructs we obtain path coefficients, corresponding t-values and p-values and effect sizes (f^2) by the bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5000. An examination of p-values in table 4 suggesting the hypothesized relationships between the exogenous constructs and satisfaction are statistically significant at the 1% level. This means, the level of customer satisfaction is positively influenced by food quality, service quality, quality of the environment, price fairness, and authenticity. Thus, we confirm part a) of each of the hypotheses. The obtained parameter estimates indicating food quality has the highest impact

on the satisfaction level, followed by the quality of environment and authenticity. All constructs do not have a statistically significant direct effect on behavioral intention and we have to reject part b) of hypotheses 1 to 5.

In addition to statistical significance, we determine the relevance of the relationship between two constructs. The effect size f² reports the difference in the R² by excluding a specific construct from the analysis. Hair et al. (2014) propose that a value for f² of 0.02 represents a small, 0.15 a medium and 0.35 a large effect. We find for our data that especially food quality is an important factor for satisfaction with an f² of 0.114. It has also the highest indirect effect on behavioral intention (indirect effect = 0.275 x 0.781 = 0.215, p-value < 0.01). Table 4 further reports the indirect and total effects of the structural model. Mediation analysis shows that for all constructs, satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between the quality criteria and behavioral intention.

<< insert Table 4: Structural Estimates, Indirect and Total Effects about here>>

Competing model

The literature review showed that perceived quality can be formulated as a second-order construct, formed through food quality, service quality and environmental quality (Jan and Namkung 2009; Zeithaml, 1988; Prayag et al., 2015). However, these extant studies did not test a hierarchical latent model. For example, Liu and Jang (2009) specify for restaurant settings that perceived quality is measured through quality of atmosphere, food quality, and quality of service but do not test a higher order construct. Hence, we construct perceived quality as a higher order construct; formatively constructed through the suggested three dimensions (see Figure 2). Wetzels et al. (2009: 178) argue that the usage of hierarchical models "allow for more theoretical parsimony

and reduce model complexity". We use the formative specification, since food quality, service quality and quality of environment are more concrete lower-order attributes, capturing different dimensions of the higher order construct satisfaction. Hair et al. (2017) refer to such a modeling approach as a collect model.

To assess the appropriateness of the formative construct "perceived quality" we use indicator weights, significance of weights and check for multicollinearity of indicators as suggested by Becker et al. (2012). Again, we use a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples to obtain significance. Results of the competing model are displayed in table 5. First, it shows the weights of all first order constructs are significant and the variance inflation factor (VIF) to assess collinearity is below the suggested value of 3.3 (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2006) for each construct.

For the estimation of the hierarchical latent model we use the repeated indicator approach in combination with the path weighting scheme (Becker et al., 2012). The adjusted R² shows that 74.1%, respectively 75.3% of the variation in satisfaction and behavioral intention can be explained by the model. The Q² assesses the inner model's predictive relevance and was obtained using the blindfolding procedure. The Q² equals 0.627 (satisfaction) and 0.656 (behavioral intention). The cross-validated redundancy measure Q2 is derived from the blindfolding procedure with an omission distance of seven.

Table 5 further shows the estimation results for the competing model. Once more we use a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5000 to obtain statistical significance. An examination of the p-values show that four out of the seven hypothesized relationships are supported by the data. Perceived quality, price fairness and authenticity have a positive and statistically significant

influence on customer satisfaction (supporting hypotheses H1a, H2a and H3a), but no direct influence on behavioral intention (rejection of hypotheses H1b, H2b and H3b) as depicted in table 5. H4 proposes that satisfaction positively influences behavioral intentions – and the hypothesis can be accepted (p<0.001). The results of the competing model are similar to the baseline model results presented in Table 3 earlier.

<<insert Figure 2: Hierarchical Model about here >>

<< insert Table 5: Validation of Formative Construct, Structural Estimates, Effect Sizes, Indirect and Total Effects (hierarchical model)>>

Discussion

Theoretical implications

This study analyzes tourists' dining experiences in mountain huts restaurants. Specifically, the relationships between different quality criteria (service, food and environment), price fairness, authenticity, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions are evaluated. By testing competing models, we show that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between the quality criteria and behavioral intentions. The findings highlight the role that cognitive aspects such as evaluation of food, service and environment quality plays in shaping perceptions of dining experiences (Goolaup et al., 2017). While previous studies have indicated relationships between each of the quality criteria and either customer satisfaction and/or behavioral intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Prayag et al., 2015; Ryu et al., 2012), there is no consensus whether these relationships hold true in different contexts or types of restaurants (Bausch and Unseld, 2017; Hanks et al., 2017). Hence, one of the contributions of this study is we show in the context of mountain hut restaurants, that positive behavioral intentions result from customer satisfaction.

In the context of mountain hut restaurants, customer satisfaction is determined by the quality of the restaurant environment similar to other types of restaurants (Jin et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2012). This is not surprising given that interior décor, room temperature and cleanliness, for example, are part of the experience that distinguishes mountain hut restaurants from other types of restaurants in Austria. Moreover, given that previous studies (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Prayag et al., 2015; Ryu et al., 2012) have assumed that customers evaluate food, service and environment quality independently, we concur with other studies (Walls et al., 2011) suggesting that these quality criteria are related and can form a higher-order construct of perceived quality. Thus, we

advance previous research that modeled these variables reflectively to show that a higher order construct also has relationships with customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Moreover, our findings give credence to Walls et al.'s (2011) argument that experiential factors do not carry equal weight for restaurant visitors. We confirm food as the main experiential component of ethnic restaurants that informs quality evaluation and support the results from existing studies in other types of restaurants (Namin, 2017; Prayag et al., 2015). More importantly, we also show that while food quality does predict customer satisfaction, there is no evidence to support that food quality directly predicts behavioral intentions. Likewise, the study supports the results from previous research that service and environmental quality in restaurants can predict customer satisfaction (Jang and Namkung, 2009). Managing employees' interactions with tourists can contribute positively to enhance the dining experience.

The study also adds to the debate in the literature on the relationship between several antecedents such as service, food and environment quality and behavioral intentions in tourists' dining experiences. Surprisingly, we find that service quality, quality of environment, food quality, price fairness, and authenticity measured have no direct relationship with behavioral intentions. This is in contrast to the findings of previous studies (e.g., Namin, 2017; Walls et al., 2011). One plausible explanation for this occurrence in our study may be related to the context of mountain hut restaurants. These restaurant can be considered as an only one-off experience for international tourists, which implies that tourists will dine only once at such restaurants as part of visiting an Austrian alpine tourist destination. As a consequence, satisfaction is more important for determining behavioral intentions rather than quality factors, price fairness, or authenticity of the experience. This is not unusual given that in casual dining restaurants, Prayag et al. (2015) found that tourists will not come back even when, for example, the environment quality of the restaurant

was rated positively. This study highlights that for a relatively unknown context, such as mountain hut restaurants, some of the most established relationships in the literature between, for example, service quality and behavioral intentions, do no replicate. Accordingly, these findings give support to the call by Hanks et al. (2017) for a more detailed and context-specific understanding of tourists' perceptions of dining experiences.

Further, our paper offers a more nuanced understanding of authenticity. We respond to the existing gap in the dining experiences literature on the role of authenticity in predicting post-consumption behaviors. For instance, due to the increased need for standardization in the hospitality industry, there is a debate with respect to how much standardization must be offered in dining experiences and to what extent authenticity is valued by customers experience (Zeng et al., 2012). Our results suggest that authenticity of the dining experience contributes positively to customer satisfaction but has no influence on behavioral intentions. In fact, the results from the base line model (Figure 1) showed that satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between authenticity and behavioral intentions. Importantly, authenticity is a stronger predictor of satisfaction than price fairness and service quality. Thus, authenticity is necessary for shaping customer satisfaction but not sufficient for generating positive return and recommend intentions. The competing model (Figure 2) also confirms this relationship. For mountain hut restaurants, authenticity is a strong determinant of satisfaction, which is similar to the context of luxury and casual dining restaurants (Han and Ryu, 2009).

Finally, our study makes a methodological contribution. By using PLS-SEM as a data analysis technique, we add to the growing number of studies in the tourism literature that have adopted this modeling technique (Do Valle and Assaker, 2016). Using PLS-SEM, offers the advantage of exploring the existence of both formative and reflective constructs and variables

within the context of tourists dining in mountain hut restaurants. As shown in our study, both the reflective and formative model are equally valuable but the indicators of perceived quality do not necessarily share a common theme. We show that a parsimonious model using a hierarchical latent model approach gives similar results to the baseline model. As such, the findings highlight the need to test competing models to fully understand the dynamics between quality components of a restaurant and its effect on post-consumption behaviors. In fact, the study shows that a formative construct of perceived quality is an alternative way of conceptualizing the relationship between food quality, service quality and environment quality.

Managerial implications

The findings have implications for managers operating mountain hut restaurants. As highlighted by the results of the study, authenticity of the dining experience influences customer satisfaction evaluations. For these restaurants, authenticity can be managed by identifying customer touchpoints with respect to food and service quality. For example, attention to food quality attributes such as presentation, taste, freshness and temperature is critical for mountain hut restaurants to not only generate satisfaction but improve perceptions that the dining experience is authentic. Likewise, friendly and helpful employees can influence whether customers perceived the restaurant atmosphere to be authentic. One way to ensure that employees contribute positively to quality perceptions and customer satisfaction is through managing emotional labor. Employees can be trained with respect to the quality of service interactions and emotional displays in front of the customer. Restaurant managers should also put in place quality control procedures to ensure that tourists receive not only consistent service but also ethnic food of the highest quality. A differentiation strategy with respect to food quality that can be used by mountain hut restaurants in comparison to other types of restaurants is to source local ingredients and use organic produce

to deliver food that is authentic and of the highest standard. These restaurants can also create signature dishes with "earthy" tones that reflect the mountain hut experience to create their own culinary identity.

The unique setting and rustic atmosphere of mountain restaurants contribute to tourists' satisfaction. As such, regular maintenance and upgrade of interior design and décor, quality control on standards of cleanliness, and management of noise levels during busy winter seasons should be at the forefront of any quality improvement programs in such restaurants. It is important that positioning strategies of these restaurants emphasize the unique setting and dining experiences that such restaurants can offer. Also, keeping prices affordable is a key factor in maintaining satisfaction levels, which in turn contribute to positive behavioral intentions. These restaurants need to communicate their positioning by emphasizing the food, service and atmospherics to distinguish themselves from other types of restaurants in Austria.

Given that environment quality, for example, does not directly influence behavioral intentions but impacts satisfaction, service design principles can be used to identify the touch points that matters to different types of customers (e.g., summer versus winter tourists). The lack of a direct relationship between several of the quality criteria and behavioral intentions suggests that the representations of current menus, food and atmosphere may not sufficiently stimulate both cognition and affect that would influence customers' intentions to recommend and/or return. Challenges arise for these restaurants that depend on repeat business to survive. Customer relationship management (CRM) strategies might help to encourage customers to revisit and recommend. For example, improving customers' perceptions of price fairness by providing discounts and rewards could be part of CRM strategies. Thus, we posit that restaurant managers

should review their marketing offer holistically by addressing aspects of quality, price fairness and authenticity to increase consumer satisfaction.

Finally, we recommend that restaurant managers should focus on managing customer engagement in their marketing strategies. The relationships between the onsite experience with respect to customers' perceptions of food and service quality suggest that customers are satisfied with various aspects of the offer but do not engage enough for them to recommend and/or return to the restaurant. In this respect, a clear social media strategy that encourages tourists to share their dining experiences on social media sites such as Facebook, twitter and Trip Advisor may be necessary to generate positive online word-of-mouth. For example, restaurant staff can stimulate and facilitate visitors to disseminate their positive experiences by offering to take pictures and videos of the food and atmosphere of the restaurant. Online competitions for best picture or best video of mountain hut restaurants can generate interest among customers to revisit but also attract new customers.

Limitations and directions for future research

By evaluating the mediating effects of satisfaction on the relationships between several quality related factors and behavioral intentions, the study contributes to the growing interest of researchers on tourists' dining experiences in ethnic restaurants. However, the study is not without limitations. For example, the findings cannot be generalized to all mountain hut restaurants as a convenience sample of these ethnic outdoor restaurants were. Further, PLS-SEM as a data analysis technique is relatively new in the hospitality and tourism domain (Do Valle and Assaker, 2016); and although newer versions of SmartPLS include several model fit measures, Hair et al. (2017) point out that they must be used with caution because the criteria are in their early stage of research. For that reason, we do not report any additional fit measures. Yet, the method is emerging and finds growing acceptance, particularly in leading hospitality outlets (e.g., Ali et al., 2018) since PLS has the advantage of including both reflective and formative variables and is confirmed to perform as well as CB-SEM for both exploratory and predictive purposes (Hair et al., 2014). Finally, the model considers only five antecedents of satisfaction and thus there are other factors such as relationship quality that have not been captured in this study that may impact satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Future studies could include other variables such as relationship quality, co-creation of the experience, and levels of customer engagement, as well as customers' affective stages, their positive and negative emotions influence the overall dining experience. For example, other factors influencing the dining experience might include levels and practices of customer engagement between the restaurant and the tourist, or customer-to-customer co-creation on the dining experience. Future studies could also advance research methodology and measurement, for example researchers can use a combination of reflective and formative constructs to further our

understanding of tourists' dining experiences. As Baxter (2009: 1377) comments, "there are often quite different possibilities for conceptualization of what might be at first sight appear to be the same construct".

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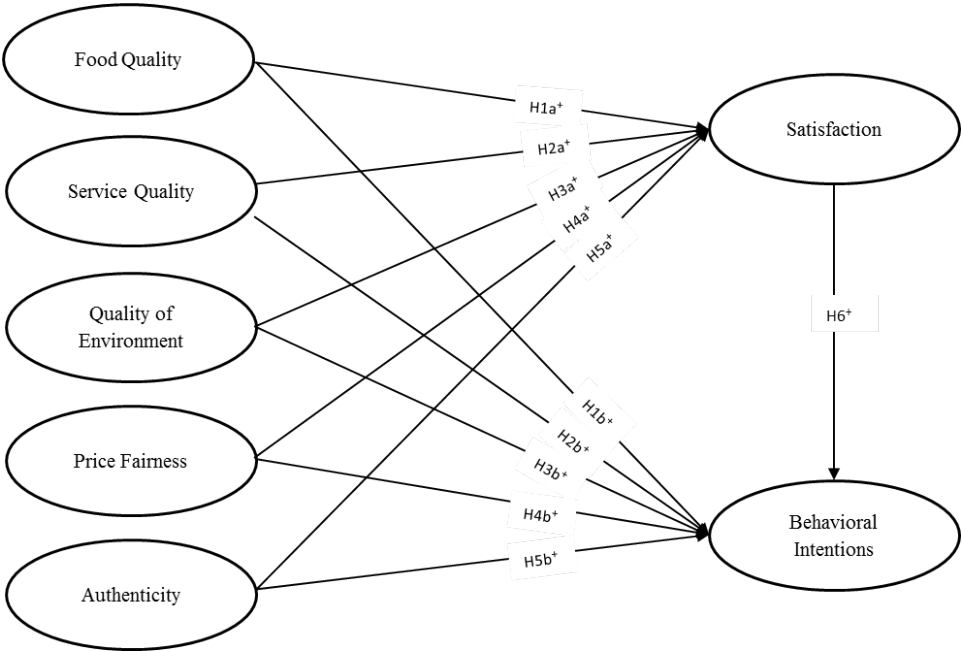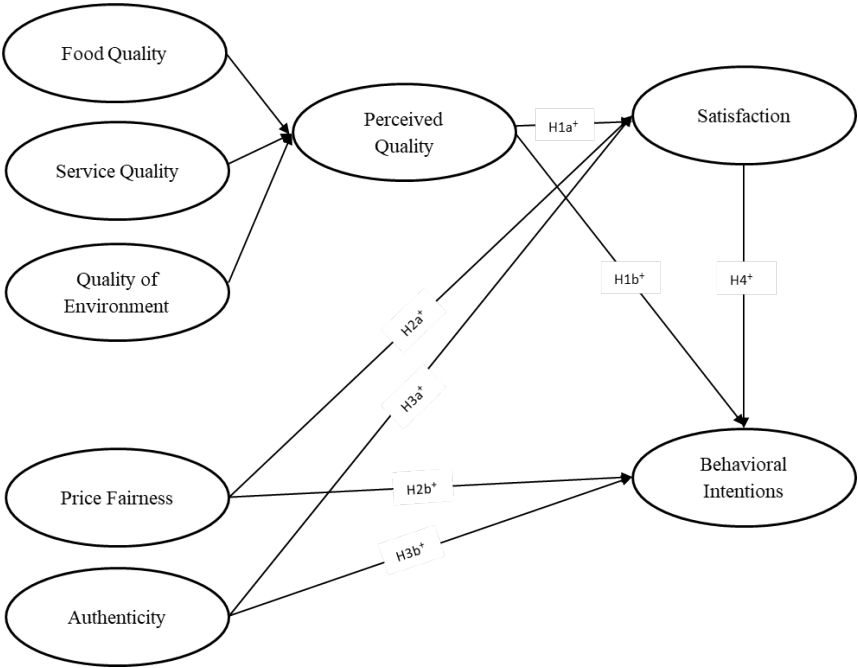
Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Figure 2: Hierarchical Model

Table 1: Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. d.	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Test Criterion				≥ 0.707	≥ 0.700	≥ 0.700	≥ 0.500
Food Quality	Food presentation	4.58	1.00	0.796	0.892	0.921	0.700
	Food taste	4.77	1.07	0.907			
	Food freshness	4.73	1.04	0.882			
	Appropriate food temperature	4.65	1.18	0.813			
	Drink taste	4.84	1.04	0.78			
Service Quality	Friendly & courteous employees	4.89	0.99	0.844	0.900	0.924	0.669
	Prompt service	4.83	1.21	0.829			
	Helpful employees	4.82	0.99	0.878			
	Employees have knowledge of the products offered	4.79	0.96	0.825			
	Waiting time before food arriving	4.78	1.28	0.76			
	Food served as ordered	5.2	1.04	0.765			
Quality of Environment	Interior design and décor	4.69	1.07	0.862	0.889	0.919	0.695
	Appropriate room temperature	4.62	1.05	0.841			
	Noise level	4.33	1.12	0.814			
	Restaurant cleanliness	4.87	1.00	0.889			
	Neat and well-dressed employees	5.06	0.84	0.755			
Price Fairness	Reasonable price of food	4.27	1.13	0.951	0.937	0.960	0.888
	Reasonable price of drinks	4.23	1.13	0.924			
	Value for money	4.34	1.09	0.952			
Authenticity	Atmosphere authenticity	4.44	1.11	0.880	0.889	0.931	0.818
	Food authenticity	4.60	0.97	0.931			
	Authentic menu presentation (traditional descriptions of food)	4.56	0.99	0.902			
Satisfaction	I am satisfied with my experience at this restaurant.	4.71	1.04	0.940	0.944	0.964	0.899
	I am pleased to have visited the restaurant.	4.61	1.21	0.957			
	I really enjoyed myself at this restaurant.	4.71	1.08	0.947			
Behavioral Intention	I would like to come back to this restaurant in the future.	4.66	1.28	0.951	0.958	0.973	0.922
	I would recommend this restaurant to my friends or others.	4.52	1.37	0.973			
	I would say positive things about this restaurant to others.	4.53	1.37	0.957			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Fornell and Larcker, 1981	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Authenticity	**0.905**						
Behavioral Intention	0.689	**0.960**					
Food Quality	0.655	0.666	**0.837**				
Price Fairness	0.626	0.600	0.622	**0.942**			
Quality of Environment	0.741	0.637	0.608	0.570	**0.833**		
Satisfaction	0.744	0.867	0.748	0.659	0.722	**0.948**	
Service Quality	0.624	0.612	0.677	0.538	0.574	0.688	**0.818**
HTMT	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Authenticity							
Behavioral Intention	0.747						
Food Quality	0.732	0.715					
Price Fairness	0.683	0.629	0.671				
Quality of Environment	0.831	0.687	0.680	0.619			
Satisfaction	0.812	0.911	0.810	0.695	0.785		
Service Quality	0.697	0.659	0.753	0.581	0.641	0.746	

Table 3: Cross Loadings

		Authenticity	Behavioral Intention	Food Quality	Price Fairness	Quality of Environment	Satisfaction	Service Quality
Behavioral Intention	bi1		0.951				0.845	
	bi2		0.973				0.830	
	bi3		0.957				0.822	
Authenticity	pa1	0.880				0.750		
	pa2	0.931					0.708	
	pa3	0.902						
Quality of Environment	peq1					0.862		
	peq2					0.841		
	peq3					0.814		
	peq4					0.889		
	peq5					0.755		
Food Quality	pfq1			0.796				
	pfq4			0.907				
	pfq5			0.882				
	pfq6			0.813				
	pfq7			0.780				
Price Fairness	ppf1				0.951			
	ppf2				0.924			
	ppf3				0.952			
Service Quality	psq1							0.844
	psq2							0.829
	psq3							0.878
	psq4							0.825
	psq5							0.760
	psq6							0.765
Satisfaction	s1	0.749	0.793	0.735			0.941	
	s2		0.843				0.957	
	s3		0.829				0.947	

Entries report cross loadings ≥0.707

Table 4: Structural Estimates, Indirect and Total Effects

Structural Estimates:					
Hypothesis Path		**Coefficient**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**f-square**
H1a	Food Quality → Satisfaction	0.275	5.334	0.000	0.114
H2a	Service Quality → Satisfaction	0.169	3.138	0.002	0.050
H3a	Quality of Environment → Satisfaction	0.229	4.553	0.000	0.080
H4a	Price Fairness → Satisfaction	0.141	2.919	0.004	0.038
H5a	Authenticity → Satisfaction	0.201	3.507	0.000	0.052
H6	Satisfaction → Behavioral Intention	0.781	11.995	0.000	0.677
H1b	Food Quality → Behavioral Intention	0.013	0.277	0.782	0.000
H2b	Service Quality → Behavioral Intention	0.004	0.088	0.930	0.000
H3b	Quality of Environment → Behavioral Intention	-0.027	0.547	0.585	0.001
H4b	Price Fairness → Behavioral Intention	0.028	0.628	0.530	0.002
H5b	Authenticity → Behavioral Intention	0.099	1.848	0.065	0.013

Indirect and Total Effects:				
Path	**Indirect effects**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Total effects**
Food Quality → Behavioral Intention	0.215	4.661	0.000	0.228
Service Quality → Behavioral Intention	0.132	2.990	0.003	0.136
Quality of Environment → Behavioral Intention	0.179	4.329	0.000	0.151
Price Fairness → Behavioral Intention	0.110	2.905	0.004	0.138
Authenticity → Behavioral Intention	0.157	3.424	0.001	0.256

Table 5: Validation of Formative Construct, Structural Estimates, Effect Sizes, Indirect and Total Effects (hierarchical model)

Validation of Formative Construct:				
Higher Order Construct	**Dimension (first-order construct)**	**Weights**	**p-value**	**VIF**
	Service Quality	0.270	0.000	2.001
Perceived Quality	Food Quality	0.445	0.000	2.126
	Quality of Environment	0.430	0.000	1.718
Structural Estimates and Effect:				
Hypothesis	**Path**	**Coefficient**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**f-square**
H1a	Perceived Quality → Satisfaction	0,628	11,982	0,000	0,498
H2a	Price Fairness → Satisfaction	0,129	2,945	0,003	0,034
H3a	Authenticity → Behavioral Intention	0,169	3,321	0,001	0,034
H4	Satisfaction → Behavioral Intention	0,765	11,189	0,000	0,615
H1b	Perceived Quality → Behavioral Intention	0,029	0,418	0,676	0,001
H2b	Price Fairness → Behavioral Intention	0,025	0,563	0,574	0,001
H3b	Authenticity → Behavioral Intention	0,082	1,551	0,121	0,010
Indirect and Total Effects:				
Path	**Indirect effects**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Total effects**
Perceived Quality → Behavioral Intention	0,480	7,741	0,000	0,509
Price Fairness → Behavioral Intention	0,099	2,969	0,003	0,124
Authenticity → Behavioral Intention	0,129	3,328	0,001	0,211