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The Impacts of Crowding Restaurant Image and Consumer Satisfaction on The Intention to Revisit

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Keywords: Crowding; Intention to Revisit; Restaurant Image; Satisfaction;	**Abstract** Human and spatial crowding presents a significant challenge in the restaurant industry, particularly influencing the likelihood of customers returning. This study aimed to examine the impact of human and spatial density on the perception of a restaurant's image and the satisfaction of its patrons, as well as to assess how these perceptions influence customers' intentions to revisit. The research involved 100 participants, who were surveyed using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. Data analysis was conducted utilizing the Structural Equation Modeling approach with WarpPLS 8.0 software. The findings revealed that both human and spatial crowding positively affect the restaurant's image and customer satisfaction. In turn, a positive image of the restaurant and high levels of customer satisfaction were found to significantly influence patrons' intentions to return to the spicy noodle restaurant. These insights suggest that restaurants could strategically leverage the presence of crowding to enhance their image and elevate customer satisfaction, thereby supporting business sustainability and encouraging repeat visits.

How To Cite (APA 6th Style):

INTRODUCTION

Despite experiencing a downturn during the pandemic, the culinary industry in Malang City has seen significant growth. This resurgence is evidenced by a substantial increase in visitor numbers, with an additional 1,978,113 people recorded in one year (BPS, 2022), leading to a boost in restaurant turnover of between 15% to 20% (Danaparamita et al., 2023). This revival has ushered in a bustling period for the restaurant sector, marked notably by instances of overcrowding in some establishments, such as the spicy noodle restaurants in Malang City. This phenomenon is indicative of environmental psychological dynamics at play.

Crowding, from an environmental psychology perspective, is understood as the sensation of being overwhelmed due to excessive social interaction or activity levels, stemming from a subjective assessment (Ruiz et al., 2021). It describes the physical proximity of consumers within a confined area (Khan et al., 2022) and is a common occurrence in various settings, including restaurants, hotels, and festivals (Wang et al., 2021). Crowding is categorized into two types: human density, which pertains to the number of people and the extent of interpersonal interactions within certain scenario, and spatial density, which relates to the arrangement and proximity of inanimate objects, such as restaurant furniture.

The congestion observed in restaurants undoubtedly influences customer satisfaction levels, affecting their likelihood of revisiting. Patrons are forced to contend with several issues stemming from both human and spatial elements, including delayed orders, a noisy and overcrowded environment, mistakes in orders, and suboptimal staff behavior. Such conditions may lead to physical jostling among customers, thereby impacting their future intentions to revisit. Crowding affects perceptions of safety, satisfaction, and loyalty, making it a focal point for ongoing research (Neuts & Vanneste, 2018; Vesci et al., 2021). This phenomenon presents a dual-edged sword for restaurants, offering both challenges and opportunities in attracting and retaining customers.
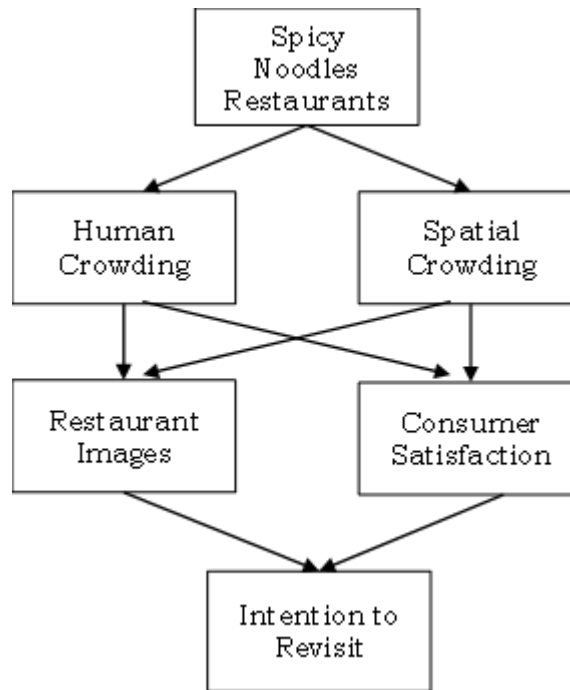
Numerous studies have explored the effects of crowding, revealing complex relationships between crowding, emotions, and perceptions of space. Specifically, crowding has been linked to negative emotions and a diminished perception of a restaurant's image, with human density inversely related to positive emotions. Conversely, crowding significantly affects restaurant image and positive emotions positively in some studies (Danaparamita et al., 2023; Quan et al., 2021). Liu & Ma, (2019) found that for Chinese

students, perceived crowding did not directly impact travel satisfaction. However, services or products that mitigate crowding's effects can enhance satisfaction. Milman et al., (2020) discovered that while perceived crowding negatively affects the internal accessibility of theme park experiences, perceived popularity positively impacts accessibility, outdoor entertainment, and retail practices, subsequently improving satisfaction and encouraging return visits.

Despite the breadth of research on crowding, studies focusing on restaurant environments, particularly in Indonesia, remain scarce. This gap underscores the novelty of the current study, which also integrates various factors, such as restaurant image, customer satisfaction, and the intention to revisit, especially in the post-COVID-19 context. This research aims to; 1) identify the characteristics of consumers at spicy noodle restaurants in Malang City, 2) analyze the impact of human and spatial crowding on the image of the restaurant and customer satisfaction, and 3) examine the effect of the restaurant's image and customer satisfaction on the intention to revisit spicy noodle restaurants in Malang City.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research framework explains the relationship between the variables used in the research presented in Figure 1. The variables in this research were developed and associated based on theoretical and empirical background based on the theories applied to support the formation of models and relationships between variables through literature studies.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

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              ┌──────────────┐
              │    Spicy     │
              │   Noodles    │
              │ Restaurants  │
              └──────────────┘
              ↙              ↘
   ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
   │    Human     │      │   Spatial    │
   │   Crowding   │      │   Crowding   │
   └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
          │   ╲        ╱     │
          ↓    ╲      ╱      ↓
   ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
   │  Restaurant  │      │   Consumer   │
   │    Images    │      │ Satisfaction │
   └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
              ↘              ↙
              ┌──────────────┐
              │ Intention to │
              │   Revisit    │
              └──────────────┘
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Sources: (Danaparamita et al., 2023; Helmi, 2015; Khan et al., 2022; Milman et al., 2020; Quan et al., 2021; Rinjani & Roostika, 2022; Ruiz et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Zehrer & Raich, 2016).

The framework of this study underscores the multifaceted impacts of crowding on consumer perceptions and behaviors within restaurant settings. Crowding, encompassing both human and spatial dimensions, serves as a critical factor in shaping the image of a restaurant. According to Wang et al., (2021), consumers often leverage the presence of crowds as a metric for evaluating a restaurant, suggesting that crowding can exert both positive and negative influences on a restaurant's image, contingent upon the context. Furthermore, confusion stemming from crowding also plays a pivotal role in determining consumer satisfaction, a concept defined by Quan et al., (2021) as an individual's overall approval and perceived quality of service during or after an encounter. Thus, people and spatial crowding emerge as significant indicators for assessing both the image of a restaurant and the satisfaction of its consumers. A favorable restaurant image and high consumer satisfaction, in turn, are pivotal in motivating consumers to revisit the establishment.

The focus of this study is the Mie Gacoan restaurant in Malang City, henceforth referred to as the spicy noodle restaurant. This venue was selected due to its prominence and the high daily patronage it enjoys, with customers often willing to endure queues. This choice is further justified by sales data from 2018 to 2022, indicating that the spicy noodle restaurant outperforms its competitors in terms of sales (Malik et al., 2019). The research was conducted over a period from June to November, encompassing stages from proposal development through to data collection, analysis, and the final preparation of the research report.

In this study, participants were selected via a non-probability, accidental sampling technique, adhering to the guideline that suggests a sample size of at least 10 times the number of variables, as recommended by Solimun et al., (2017). Consequently, a minimum sample size of 50 was initially considered, but this figure was increased to 100 to ensure a more representative sample of consumers at spicy noodle restaurants.

For the collection of primary data, the study employed a questionnaire disseminated through Google Forms, which participants accessed via links shared on social media platforms. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale format, featuring five alternative responses each assigned a specific score. Secondary data was compiled through an extensive review of relevant literature.

The first objective of the research was tackled using descriptive statistical analysis to delineate and understand the characteristics of respondents frequenting spicy noodle restaurants in Malang City. This objective focused on variables including age, gender, domicile, occupation, income or pocket money, and the frequency of visits within a month. The findings from this analysis were presented through means, percentages, and frequencies derived from the respondents' data.

The second objective was addressed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis via the WarpPLS 8.0 application. This analysis aimed to assess the impact of exogenous variables (human and spatial crowding) on endogenous variables (restaurant image and consumer satisfaction) within the context of spicy noodle restaurants.

SEM analysis was also used to analyze the data related to the third objective of this research, focusing on the effects of restaurant image and consumer satisfaction on consumers' intention to revisit a spicy noodle restaurant. Both objectives were analyzed through a variance-based SEM approach, specifically using the Partial Least Square (PLS) method. This approach was chosen to estimate a path model incorporating latent

variables represented by multiple indicators, aligning with the research model that included 2 exogenous variables and 3 endogenous variables. SEM analysis comprised two primary tests: the outer model test, conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments, and the inner model test, which evaluated the relationships between latent variables. The structure of the equation model was depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Equation Model Framework
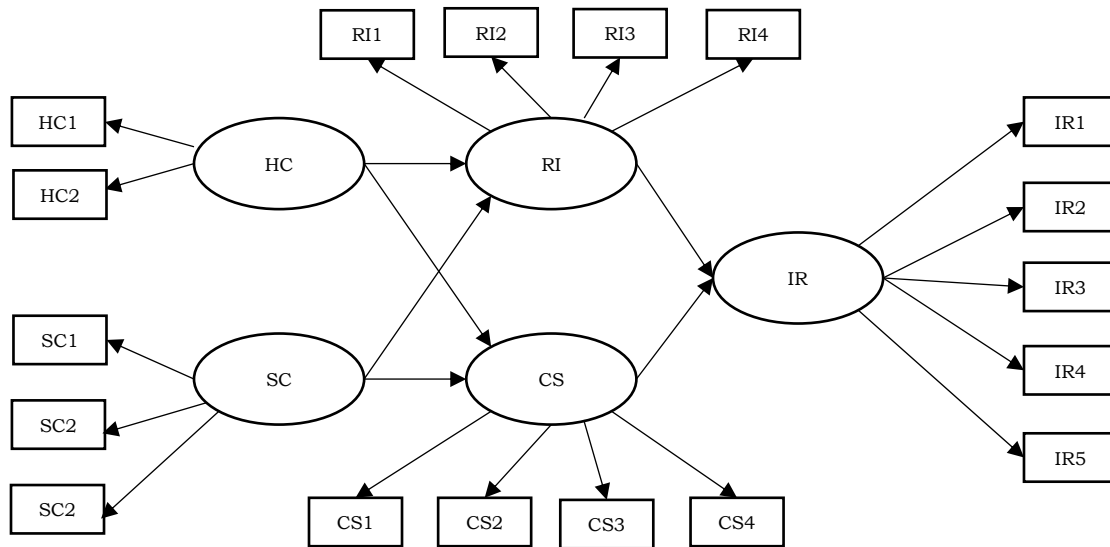
Source: (Adixio & Saleh, 2013; Danaparamita et al., 2023; Firmansyah, 2018; Milman et al., 2020; Quan et al., 2021; Ruiz et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Zehrer & Raich, 2016).

The variable human crowding (HC) was measured using two indicators: the large number of visitors (HC1) and the feelings of discomfort due to the presence of many visitors (HC2). Spatial crowding (SC) was assessed through three variables: perceived narrow/limited space (SC1), difficulty in moving (SC2), and the proximity of tables and chairs to each other (SC3). The restaurant image (RI) was evaluated using four indicators: atmosphere (RI1), food quality (RI2), interior design (RI3), and service (RI4). Customer satisfaction (CS) was measured by four indicators: satisfaction with the food's price (CS1), the quality of the food (CS2), the level of spiciness (CS3), and the service (CS4). The intention to revisit (IR) was gauged with five indicators: being the main choice (IR1), preference for this restaurant over similar ones for transactions (IR2), the likelihood of trying more variants from the restaurant (IR3), purchasing for a good experience (IR4), and the intention to repurchase in the future (IR5).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Characteristics

This study examined the characteristics of its respondents based on six indicators: gender, age, place of residence, occupation, income or pocket money, and the frequency of purchasing spicy noodles. The findings related to these characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics Based on Gender, Age and Domicile (n=100)

Indicator	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	82	82
	Male	18	18
Age (Years Old)	17-25	85	85
	26-35	11	11
	36-55	4	4
Domicile	Malang	71	71
	Mojokerto	8	8
	Gresik	9	9
	Others	12	12

Source: Primary Data (2024) processed

Table 1 illustrates the demographics of respondents based on gender, age, and domicile. It reveals that 82% of the participants are women, while 18% are men. This disparity in gender response rates might be attributed to women's pronounced preference for foods that are notably spicy and sour, as compared to men (Danaparamita et al., 2023; Rini & Gunaningrat, 2022). Additionally, 85% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 17-25 years, indicating a strong inclination among the youth towards foods that offer unique and adventurous tastes, such as sweet, savory, salty, and spicy flavors. Examples of such foods include instant noodles in novel flavors, presented with the gimmick of 'flying chopsticks,' or dishes that vary in spice levels (Insani, 2019; Santoso et al., 2018). Moreover, the majority of respondents (71%) reside in Malang, suggesting a preference among consumers for dining options that are conveniently located close to their living areas (Fauziah et al., 2022).

Table 2. Respondents' Characteristics Based on Occupation, Income, and Purchase Frequency (n-100)

| Indicator	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Occupation	Student	80	80
	Employee	5	5
	Teacher	4	4
	Others	11	11
Income	< IDR 500,000	18	18
	IDR 500.000 – IDR 1,000,000	47	47
	IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 2,000,000	19	19
	IDR 2,000,000 - IDR 3,000,000	10	10
	> IDR 3,000,000	6	6
Purchase Frequency	1-2 times	21	21
	3-4 times	26	26
	5-6 times	16	16
	>6 times	37	37

Source: Primary Data (2024) processed

The profile of respondents, primarily defined by their employment status, reveals a significant majority of students at 80%, illustrating that this demographic, belonging to the productive and tech-savvy millennial generation, actively seeks out popular venues to maintain social relevance. They are particularly drawn to trendy restaurants that offer various facilities for unwinding after academic engagements (Danaparamita et al., 2023). With regards to income, 47% of the participants fall within the IDR 500,000 to IDR 1,000,000 range, indicating a consumer segment, especially students, that evaluates dining options based on a balanced consideration of quality, price, product variety, location, and food presentation (Panili & Shaferi, 2015). Additionally, the frequency of visits to spicy noodle establishments more than six times is reported by 37% of respondents, suggesting that factors such as quality, price, product diversity, ambiance, and aesthetic appeal significantly influence dining choices. The popularity of these restaurants among students is further enhanced by the provision of a relaxing atmosphere, attractive decor, and Wi-Fi availability, catering to their needs for both leisure and academic productivity (Pamelia, 2018).

The Influence of Human and Spatial Crowding on Restaurant Image and Consumer Satisfaction

The results of the structural analysis of research modeling display path coefficient values which indicate the direction of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. The results of the equation modeling are presented in Figure 3 as follows.

Figure 3. SEM Outcome
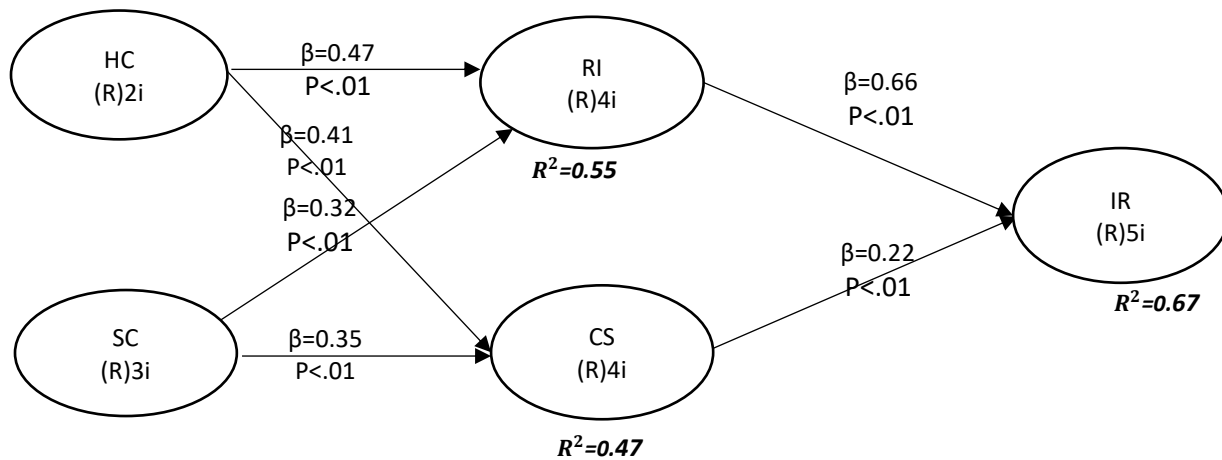
Source: Primary Data Processed (2024)

The results of structural equation modeling need to be evaluated before interpretation was carried out to measure the relationship between variables and their measurement indicators as well as the relationship between latent variables in the research. Table 3 shows several measurements that can be used to evaluate structural equation models including the AVE value, Cronbrach Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and R-square value.

Table 3. Measurement Results of Research Models

Latent Variable	Number of Indicator	AVE	Cronbrach Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	R-square (R^2)
Human Crowding	2	0.862	0.929	0.840	-
Spatial Crowding	3	0.741	0.895	0.824	-
Restaurant Image	4	0.668	0.889	0.834	0.55
Consumer Satisfaction	4	0.656	0.884	0.824	0.47
Intention to Revisit	5	0.704	0.924	0.897	0.67

Source: Primary Data (2024) processed

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeds the 0.5 threshold, indicating that all indicators successfully meet the criteria for convergent validity. This suggests that the indicators effectively capture the essence of the latent variables (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the reliability analysis results, also detailed in Table 3, demonstrate that every indicator possesses Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) scores above 0.70. Such scores signify a high level of reliability, affirming that the indicators are precise in measuring the variables (Solimun et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the R-square (R²) values for each endogenous latent variable, as shown in Table 3, span from 0 to 1. Higher R² values are indicative of a model's improved predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis categorizes the R² values of the endogenous variables as moderate (Chin et al., 2003). The subsequent assessment of Goodness of Fit (GoF) confirms that all indicators satisfy the criteria for this metric, underscoring the robustness of the model's fit.

Table 4. Results of Analysis of the Influence of Human Crowding and Spatial on Restaurant Image and Consumer Satisfaction

	Inter-Variable Correlation		Path Coefficient	*P-value*	Remarks
	Independent Variable	**Dependent Variable**			
H1	Human Crowding (HC)	Restaurant Image (RI)	0.472	<0.001	Accepted
H2	Spatial Crowding (SC)	Restaurant Image (RI)	0.317	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Human Crowding (HC)	Consumer Satisfaction (CS)	0.411	<0.001	Accepted
H4	Spatial Crowding (SC)	Consumer Satisfaction (CS)	0.348	<0.001	Accepted

Source: Primary Data (2024) processed

The analysis presented in Table 4 regarding the impact of human and spatial crowding on restaurant image and consumer satisfaction reveals that all posited hypotheses are significant and confirmed. Specifically, human and spatial crowding positively influence the restaurant's image, with path coefficients of 0.472 and 0.317, respectively. Contrary to what might be expected, the presence of human and spatial congestion at spicy noodle restaurants contributes positively to their image. This phenomenon suggests that consumers perceive the crowdedness as an indicator of the restaurant's popularity, associating it with the quality and appeal of the spicy noodles,

which are known for their delicious taste and customizable spice levels, alongside a diverse menu.

This crowding, particularly noted in spicy noodle restaurants, not only signifies the establishment's popularity in Malang City but also its widespread recognition across various regions in Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali. The restaurant's popularity extends to social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, drawing large numbers of consumers who are willing to queue for the dining experience. The analysis indicates that even spatial crowding, where limited spacing between chairs or tables might restrict movement, does not deter customers. Instead, they are drawn in by the restaurant's physical layout, contemporary ambiance, and decor. With a semi-outdoor design, the restaurant offers dining experiences in both indoor and outdoor settings, further enhanced by amenities such as prayer rooms, clean restrooms, and free WiFi, making it an attractive venue for groups seeking a relaxed and enjoyable dining atmosphere.

These findings align with previous research indicating that a crowded environment in commercial settings like shops and restaurants can positively impact the establishment's image. The presence of many visitors serves as a consumer evaluation metric, where high traffic is associated with attributes like quality, affordability, and a favorable image of the restaurant (Adinda et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2011; Quan et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Milman et al., (2020) highlighted a positive correlation between human crowding and perceived popularity, suggesting that a bustling restaurant is perceived as a marker of quality in food, comfort, and service. Furthermore, Quan et al., (2021) observed that consumer reactions to spatial density vary, influenced by factors such as the restaurant's atmosphere, decoration, visual appeal, and service quality, all of which can enhance the positive image of a restaurant in the minds of consumers.

Danaparamita et al., (2023) explored how customers react to high spatial density in restaurants, finding that individuals tend to mitigate stress from crowding by ignoring their surroundings and focusing on positive aspects of the restaurant's environment. Patrons facing crowded conditions shift their attention to the restaurant's visual appeal, including its design, facilities, and entertainment options. This evaluation of the physical environment helps them to manage perceptions of crowding. Espinosa et al.,

(2018) identified that valued restaurant features among consumers include ample parking, favorable location, lighting, music, and a diverse menu offering.

Further analysis reveals that human and spatial crowding exert a positive and significant impact on consumer satisfaction, with path coefficients of 0.411 and 0.348, respectively. In the context of a spicy noodle restaurant, customer satisfaction is attributed to the high quality of food that meets consumer expectations. Patrons appreciate the food's quality, reasonable pricing, and swift service despite the restaurant's bustling atmosphere. The staff's efficiency in managing seating arrangements minimizes waiting times, enhancing customer satisfaction. This indicates that the presence of many customers, supported by sufficient staff, positively influences satisfaction levels. Notably, customers experience spatial congestion during ordering and payment processes, especially when the cashier area is small and typically accommodates only one counter for dine-in customers, leading to extended lines. To address this, spicy noodle restaurants occasionally deploy additional staff to expedite order taking and payment processes. Moreover, these establishments prioritize maintaining cleanliness and feature an open kitchen design, allowing customers to witness the preparation of their meals, assuring them of the cleanliness and quality of their food. This approach demonstrates that effective management of customer issues in crowded situations can lead to heightened consumer satisfaction, even in the face of perceived congestion.

Research indicates that a crowded venue often signals its attractiveness, with studies by (Kim et al., 2016). Lee et al., (2011) showing a positive correlation between human density and customer satisfaction. Satisfaction stems from factors like affordable prices, high-quality food, and swift service, which alleviate the stress of waiting (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2003). Consumers seek a mix of value, quality service, and unique menu options, with Espinosa et al., (2018) highlighting desires for an enjoyable dining atmosphere. Crowded places can evoke positive emotions and enhance the perception of a location (Jacobsen et al., 2019), with perceived popularity in the hospitality sector seen as a marker of good reputation and high-quality offerings (Liu & Ma, 2019). Zehrer & Raich (2016) discuss how consumer experiences shape expectations and post-purchase behavior, while Wang et al., (2021) note the significant roles of the physical environment. Ruiz et al., (2021) show social experiences in

influencing consumer choices and satisfaction, despite the potential negative impacts of excessive crowding.

The Influence of Restaurant Image and Consumer Satisfaction on Consumer Intention to Revisit

The results of the analysis of the influence of Restaurant Image and Consumer Satisfaction on consumers' Intention to Revisit at spicy noodle restaurants are presented in Table 5 as follows.

Table 5. Results of Analysis of the Influence of Restaurant Image and Satisfaction on Consumer Intention to Revisit

	Inter-Variable Correlation		Path Coefficient	*P-value*	Remarks
	Independent Variable	**Dependent Variable**			
H5	Restaurant Image (IR)	Intention to Revisit (IR)	0.455	<0.001	Accepted
H6	Consumer Satisfaction (CS)	Intention to Revisit (IR)	0.293	<0.001	Accepted

Source: Primary Data (2024) processed

The analysis in Table 5 reveals that hypotheses 5 and 6 are significantly supported, with coefficients of 0.455 and 0.293 respectively, and a p-value of less than 0.001, highlighting the impact of a positive restaurant image on consumer behavior towards making repeat purchases. The "master of noodles" tagline and its popularity as a top choice for spicy noodle enthusiasts in Malang City contribute to this effect. Key factors such as the restaurant's ambiance, good lighting, and adequate air circulation enhance dining experiences, encouraging customers to return. This is further evidenced by an average Google review score of 4.6 across four branches, based on 1668 reviews, underscoring consumer trust and the restaurant's favorable image. The variety of menus and spiciness levels also plays a significant role in repeat visitation, with consumers eager to explore different options. The safety guarantees in food quality and a secure environment, including convenient and spacious parking, reinforce this trust.

Literature supports that a strong restaurant image not only increases the likelihood of repeat purchases but also builds customer loyalty (Bernarto et al., 2022; Farizan et al., 2019; Putri & Yasa, 2022). It reflects consumer perceptions of the value received, which has become increasingly relevant in the context of heightened food safety awareness post-pandemic (Abbas et al., 2021; Soon et al., 2021). Beyond unique

culinary offerings or aesthetic decor, factors like an accessible location enhance the restaurant's appeal (Clarita, 2023), crucial in tourist areas where ease of access can significantly influence the establishment's image (Suryawardani et al., (2021). Ultimately, a restaurant's image, shaped by a combination of unique attributes and the fulfillment of consumer expectations, plays a pivotal role in driving satisfaction and repeat patronage (Bhakuni et al., 2021).

The analysis underscores the significant influence of consumer satisfaction on the intention to revisit, highlighting the positive experiences related to food, service, and pricing drive repeat purchase intentions. Data reveals consumers frequent the spicy noodle restaurant more than twice a month on average, attributing their loyalty to consistent food quality, service excellence, and value for money, with food prices starting from IDR 10,000 and drinks from IDR 5,000. Moreover, the restaurant's strategic location and ample parking space enhance accessibility, further satisfying customers.

This discovery aligns with existing research that identifies consumer satisfaction as a pivotal element in fostering product repurchase intentions (Doeim et al., 2022; Putri & Yasa, 2022; Wardi et al., 2022). Food quality, perception of service, and the overall dining experience are key determinants in restaurant selection, where greater satisfaction with these aspects increases the likelihood of future visits (Blut & Iyer, 2020). Satisfied customers are more inclined to return and recommend the restaurant to others (Viet et al., 2020). Creating an environment that meets emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs can also elevate satisfaction (Solunoğlu, 2020). Moreover, a convenient and accessible location with sufficient parking is crucial in attracting consumers (Wati et al., 2020).These findings suggest that understanding and enhancing consumer satisfaction are essential strategies for fostering loyalty and repeat visitation to restaurants.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is evident that majority of frequent patrons at spicy noodle restaurants in Malang City are women, most of whom are students and have visited these establishments over six times a month. Regarding the effects of congestion, both human and spatial crowding have been identified as significant factors that affect the perception of the restaurant's image and the satisfaction levels of customers at spicy noodle eateries in Malang City. Furthermore, the image of the restaurant and customer

satisfaction play crucial roles in shaping the intentions of consumers to return to these spicy noodle restaurants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Restaurant managers should focus on enhancing the establishment's image by ensuring high-quality food and maintaining the physical ambiance of the restaurant. Additionally, boosting customer satisfaction through providing value for money and elevating service levels is crucial for increasing the likelihood of customers returning. The primary limitation of the study is its relatively small sample size of only 100 respondents, which may not fully capture the broader context. Future studies should aim to include a larger sample size and consider additional variables such as gender and age differences to assess perceptions of crowding more comprehensively. Further research is also encouraged to explore the impact of spreading from a person to another intentions and consumer loyalty, or to investigate these effects in contexts beyond restaurants, to better understand the broader implications of crowding on consumer behavior.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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