

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULINARY QUALITY AND REVISIT INTENTION****Sofiah Nur Iradawaty**

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Email: sofiahiradawatii@gmail.com**ABSTRACT:**

The Surabaya Culinary Tourism Center is a strategic initiative by the Surabaya City Government designed to promote local economic development, empower micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and enhance experience-based tourism. This study investigates the relationships among culinary quality, emotional experience, and revisit intention within the context of culinary tourism in Surabaya. Employing a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 250 domestic tourists using purposive sampling and analyzed through PLS-SEM. The findings reveal that culinary quality significantly influences emotional experience. Furthermore, emotional experience plays a significant mediating role between culinary quality and revisit intention. In contrast, the direct effect of culinary quality on revisit intention was found to be statistically insignificant. These results underscore the pivotal role of emotional experience in fostering visitor loyalty and align with the Experience Economy framework, wherein emotional engagement serves as a critical determinant of consumer behavior. The study offers practical implications for culinary tourism managers to improve not only the quality of food offerings but also the overall experiential value to encourage repeat visits.

Keywords:

Culinary Quality, Emotional Experience, Revisit Intention, Tourism Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

Surabaya, one of Indonesia's major metropolitan cities, has emerged as a vital hub for both economic growth and tourism development. Among its leading sectors, the culinary industry plays a strategic role in attracting domestic and international tourists. To strengthen this sector, the Surabaya City Government has initiated the development of Culinary Tourism Centers (*Sentra Wisata Kuliner* or SWK), such as G-Walk, Kya-Kya, and Pakuwon Food Festival. These initiatives serve not only as tourist attractions but also as platforms to empower local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). SWKs have become promotional venues for regional culinary products and contribute significantly to improving the economic well-being of local communities through MSME development (Mochklas et al., 2024). Furthermore, these culinary spaces cultivate a sociopreneurial ecosystem that fosters entrepreneurial independence and business sustainability among local women entrepreneurs (Putri, Mochklas, & Senoaji, 2024).

Despite the resilience of the culinary MSME sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, structural challenges persist. These include service quality gaps, limited digital competitiveness, and low customer loyalty. Research by Mochklas, Panggayudi, and Nurhayati (2023) reveals that MSMEs under LAZISMU East Java face significant obstacles in adopting e-commerce platforms, particularly related to digital infrastructure, human resource capacity, and digital literacy. These findings underscore the importance of implementing adaptive and innovative marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of culinary tourism destinations.

One of the main challenges facing culinary tourism centers is the low rate of repeat visits, largely attributed to suboptimal service quality and customer experience. Prior studies have highlighted the importance of culinary quality in shaping consumer behavior. Namkung and Jang (2007) emphasize that taste, hygiene, presentation, and uniqueness are critical attributes influencing consumer satisfaction and revisit intentions. In the context of Surabaya's culinary tourism zones, Iradawati (2024) found that food and beverage quality, destination image, and pricing simultaneously affect consumers' purchasing decisions. Additionally, research by Gumay and Siahaan (2022) shows that destination image plays the most dominant role in shaping tourists' decisions, surpassing the influence of pricing and other attractions.

Nonetheless, existing literature has yet to fully explore the mediating role of emotional experience in the relationship between culinary quality and revisit intention. In the framework of the Experience Economy, Pine

and Gilmore (1999) argue that consumers seek emotionally enriching experiences rather than mere consumption of goods. This notion is supported by Hosany and Gilbert (2010) and Han and Jeong (2013), who demonstrate that positive emotions—such as satisfaction, comfort, and delight—strongly influence tourists' loyalty toward destinations.

Ramadhani and Mochklas (2023) also affirm that destination image and subjective norms significantly influence tourists' intentions to visit Lombok, recognized as a world-class halal tourism destination. These findings emphasize that both cognitive (quality and image) and affective (emotions) dimensions are pivotal in shaping tourism behavior, particularly within the context of culinary destinations.

Given this context, the present study aims to examine the influence of culinary quality on tourists' revisit intention, with emotional experience serving as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on destination marketing and offer practical insights for culinary tourism managers in Surabaya seeking to create experiences that are not only gastronomically satisfying but also emotionally engaging for visitors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Culinary Quality

Culinary quality is a critical factor in attracting and retaining tourist interest, as it shapes consumers' perceptions through elements such as taste, food presentation, hygiene, and the uniqueness of serving styles. Namkung and Jang (2007) emphasized that both flavor and visual appeal significantly influence customer satisfaction and revisit intention. Similarly, Choi et al. (2011) found that perceived food quality contributes to consumer loyalty, especially in experience-driven destinations.

A local study by Iradawati (2024) on culinary hotspots in Surabaya revealed that food quality and pricing significantly influence purchase decisions. Within the framework of the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), culinary excellence captures consumer attention and generates interest, potentially guiding them through the decision-making process. Likewise, Gumay and Siahaan (2022) demonstrated that perceived quality positively shapes destination image, which in turn stimulates visit intention—aligned with the A–D–A stages of the AIDA model.

Hypothesis H1: Culinary quality has a positive and significant effect on revisit intention.

2.2 Emotional Experience

Emotional experience refers to tourists' affective responses toward service quality, ambience, and social interaction during their visit. Pine and Gilmore's (1999) *Experience Economy* theory posits that modern consumers seek emotionally resonant experiences beyond mere product consumption. Supporting this, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) as well as Han and Jeong (2013) found that positive emotions—such as joy, satisfaction, and comfort—enhance tourists' attachment to a destination.

According to the *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Ajzen, 1991), emotional experience influences visitors' attitudes toward future behavioral intentions. When tourists experience positive emotions, their attitude toward revisiting the destination improves, strengthening their intention to return.

In the Indonesian context, Ravikawati, Fatihudin, and Mochklas (2016) observed that positive perceptions of ambience and service can generate pleasant emotional states, which in turn foster customer loyalty toward culinary destinations.

Hypothesis H2: Culinary quality positively and significantly influences visitors' emotional experience.

Hypothesis H3: Emotional experience positively and significantly influences revisit intention.

Studies by Tsai and Wang (2017) further validated that perceptions of traditional food quality directly affect emotional states, which subsequently enhance revisit intention. Similarly, Chen and Hu (2010) found that emotional experience mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. In this context, emotional experience serves as a psychological mechanism that transforms perceived culinary quality into affective bonds—ultimately fostering loyal behaviors such as repeat visitation.

Hypothesis H4: Emotional experience mediates the effect of culinary quality on revisit intention.

2.3 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention reflects the degree of customer loyalty toward a destination and is often influenced by prior positive experiences. According to Oliver (1999), intention to revisit arises from satisfaction and favorable evaluations based on past consumption. Han and Jeong (2013) stated that revisit intention serves as an indicator of a destination's success in cultivating long-term customer engagement.

In alignment with the *Theory of Planned Behavior*, revisit intention is shaped by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. When tourists feel satisfied, perceive social support, and believe they are capable of revisiting the destination, their behavioral intentions are strengthened.

Empirical evidence from Gumay and Siahaan (2022) at the Floating Market Lembang and Iradawati (2024) in Surabaya's culinary centers confirms that food quality and destination image substantially influence tourist decisions—closely linked to the likelihood of repeat visitation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design aimed at examining the causal relationships among culinary quality, emotional experience, and revisit intention. The target population comprises domestic tourists who have visited Culinary Tourism Centers (Sentra Wisata Kuliner/SWK) in Surabaya. A purposive sampling technique was adopted, with participants selected based on their prior experience of dining at the location. A total of 250 valid responses were collected, which satisfies the minimum sample size requirement for analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as recommended by Hair et al. (2017).

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for evaluating reflective latent constructs and its robustness in handling non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2020). The research model includes three main constructs: (1) Culinary Quality, assessed through five indicators—taste, presentation, hygiene, uniqueness, and consistency; (2) Emotional Experience as a mediating variable, measured by satisfaction, comfort, happiness, memorable experience, and excitement; and (3) Revisit Intention, measured by willingness to return, intention to recommend, and future revisit plans. All indicators were adapted and modified from previous validated studies (Namkung & Jang, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Han & Jeong, 2013; Oliver, 1999).

4. RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Understanding the demographic profile of respondents is essential for contextualizing the research findings, assessing external validity, and evaluating the generalizability of the results. Key demographic variables such as age, gender, and marital status provide insights into consumer characteristics that may influence perceptions and behaviors in the culinary tourism context.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	44%
	Female	140	56%
Age	< 20 years	38	15%
	21–30 years	87	35%
	31–40 years	85	34%
	> 40 years	40	16%
Marital Status	Married	128	51%
	Unmarried	122	49%

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female (56%), while male respondents accounted for 44%. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion fell within the 21–30 age group (35%), followed closely by those aged 31–40 (34%), respondents under 20 years old (15%), and those above 40 years (16%). Regarding marital status, 51% of respondents were married, while 49% were unmarried. These findings indicate that the sample is predominantly composed of young, productive-age females. Such a profile is highly relevant to culinary tourism studies, as young consumers—particularly women—are often key decision-makers in dining and travel experiences.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that each latent construct in the study met the required criteria for validity and reliability. This assessment involved examining convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and the outer loadings of each indicator to determine their contribution to the respective constructs. The structural

configuration of the measurement model, including the relationships between constructs and indicators, is illustrated in Figure 1.

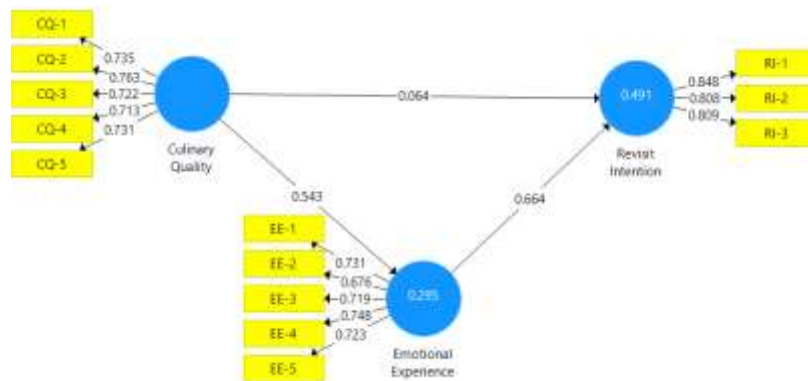


Figure 1 illustrates the structural model employed in this study, which investigates the effect of culinary quality on revisit intention, with emotional experience serving as a mediating variable. Evaluating the measurement model is a critical step in this research to ensure that the constructs Culinary Quality, Emotional Experience, and Revisit Intention demonstrate adequate validity and reliability. Such evaluation enhances the credibility of the findings and ensures that they accurately reflect the underlying phenomena. Table 2 presents the results of the measurement model assessment.

Table 2. Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading Value	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Culinary Quality	CQ-1	0.735	0.785	0.853	0.537
	CQ-2	0.763			
	CQ-3	0.722			
	CQ-4	0.713			
	CQ-5	0.731			
Emotional Experience	EE-1	0.731	0.772	0.843	0.518
	EE-2	0.676			
	EE-3	0.719			
	EE-4	0.748			
	EE-5	0.723			
Revisit Intention	RI-1	0.848	0.761	0.862	0.675
	RI-2	0.808			
	RI-3	0.809			

As shown in Table 2, the evaluation of the measurement model confirms that all latent constructs Culinary Quality, Emotional Experience, and Revisit Intention meet the required criteria for convergent validity and construct reliability. Convergent validity is supported by outer loading values predominantly above 0.70, indicating that the indicators adequately reflect their respective constructs. Although one indicator under Emotional Experience (EE-2) recorded a slightly lower loading of 0.676, it remains within the acceptable threshold, particularly as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the construct exceeds the minimum standard, at 0.518. Moreover, all AVE values surpass the recommended cut-off of 0.50, with Culinary Quality at 0.537, Emotional Experience at 0.518, and Revisit Intention at 0.675, suggesting that over 50% of the variance in the indicators is explained by the respective constructs.

From the reliability perspective, all three constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency. This is evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70 (Culinary Quality = 0.785; Emotional Experience = 0.772; Revisit Intention = 0.761) and Composite Reliability scores above 0.80 (Culinary Quality = 0.853; Emotional Experience

= 0.843; Revisit Intention = 0.862). These results indicate that the measurement items consistently capture the intended conceptual dimensions. Therefore, the measurement instruments used in this study are deemed valid and reliable, allowing for robust structural model analysis.

The R-squared (R^2) value is employed to assess the extent to which the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable where a higher R^2 indicates better predictive power of the model.

Table 3. R-Square Test Results

Dependent Variable	R-Square
Emotional Experience	0.295
Revisit Intention	0.491

Based on the R-Square analysis results presented in Table 6, it was found that Culinary Quality accounts for 29.5% of the variance in Emotional Experience, while the combined influence of Culinary Quality and Emotional Experience explains 49.1% of the variance in Revisit Intention. These findings indicate that although culinary quality has a moderate effect on shaping tourists' emotional responses, other influencing factors not captured in the model may also contribute. Furthermore, the combined explanatory power of both variables on revisit intention is considered moderately strong, based on established benchmarks for R^2 interpretation in social science research. These results suggest that enhancing tourist loyalty requires more than delivering high-quality culinary products; it also necessitates the creation of positive and memorable emotional experiences during their visits.

Table 4. Total Effects Test Results with T-Statistics and P-Values

Path Relationship	Total Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value
Culinary Quality → Emotional Experience	0.543	13.120	0.000
Culinary Quality → Revisit Intention	0.424	8.671	0.000
Emotional Experience → Revisit Intention	0.664	16.527	0.000

As presented in Table 4, the total effects analysis indicates that all hypothesized relationships among variables in this study are statistically significant, evidenced by high T-statistics and p-values of 0.000. Culinary Quality significantly influences Emotional Experience, with a path coefficient of 0.543 ($T = 13.120$), suggesting that higher perceived food quality enhances tourists' emotional responses. Moreover, Culinary Quality also exerts a significant direct and indirect effect on Revisit Intention ($\beta = 0.424$, $T = 8.671$), reinforcing its strategic role in shaping repeat visitation behavior. Notably, Emotional Experience emerges as the strongest predictor of Revisit Intention, with a coefficient of 0.664 ($T = 16.527$), highlighting its pivotal role in fostering tourist loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of designing culinary strategies that go beyond functional excellence to evoke memorable emotional experiences, ultimately strengthening tourists' intentions to revisit culinary destinations.

Table 5. Results and Analysis of Total Indirect Effects

Indirect Path	Indirect Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value
Culinary Quality → Revisit Intention (via Emotional Experience)	0.360	10.450	0.000

Table 5 presents the results of the total indirect effects analysis, revealing that Culinary Quality exerts a statistically significant indirect influence on Revisit Intention through Emotional Experience, with a coefficient of 0.360, a T-statistic of 10.450, and a p-value of 0.000. These findings indicate that emotional experience serves as a robust mediating variable, bridging tourists' perceptions of culinary quality with their intention to revisit. In essence, the quality of food not only affects visitors directly but also psychologically evokes positive emotions, which in turn enhance tourist loyalty toward the destination. This underscores the critical role of creating emotionally resonant

experiences in culinary tourism not solely through food products, but also via ambiance, service quality, and social interaction.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the empirical findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks and previous studies, aiming to deepen the understanding of tourist behavior in culinary tourism settings.

a. The Influence of Culinary Quality on Emotional Experience

The results of this study indicate a significant and positive relationship between culinary quality and emotional experience among visitors to culinary tourism centers. This suggests that when tourists perceive high levels of culinary quality reflected in taste, presentation, hygiene, and uniqueness they are more likely to experience positive emotions such as satisfaction, pleasure, and affective engagement during their visit. These findings align with the Experience Economy theory proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which emphasizes that consumers seek meaningful, emotionally engaging experiences rather than merely physical products.

This result is further supported by prior research. Han and Jeong (2013) argue that service and product quality in the culinary sector can elicit strong emotional responses, enhancing the tourist–destination relationship. Similarly, Namkung and Jang (2007), as well as Tsai and Wang (2017), highlight the importance of taste and visual presentation in evoking positive emotions and customer loyalty. Locally, Iradawati (2024) found that food quality at Surabaya's Culinary Tourism Center significantly influences purchase decisions due to emotional satisfaction. However, some studies offer a nuanced perspective. For example, research by Ali, Kim, and Ryu (2016) in metropolitan culinary destinations revealed that even when food quality is high, emotional experiences may not emerge strongly without supportive ambiance, quality service, or positive social interaction. Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) further noted that in experience-based tourism, emotional responses are more often shaped by atmosphere and social context rather than food alone. These insights underscore that while culinary quality is essential, emotional experiences are multidimensional and rely on other complementary elements.

The practical implication of this finding is crucial for the development of culinary tourism, particularly for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operating in culinary centers. Enhancing food quality should be accompanied by the creation of emotionally engaging environments. By delivering memorable emotional experiences through both culinary excellence and contextual support such as ambiance and hospitality culinary destinations can boost their attractiveness and foster sustainable growth in the creative economy.

c. The Effect of Culinary Quality on Revisit Intention

The findings of this study demonstrate that culinary quality exerts a statistically significant and positive influence on tourists' revisit intention to culinary tourism destinations. This suggests that higher consumer perceptions of food quality—particularly regarding taste, presentation, cleanliness, and visual appeal—are associated with an increased likelihood of returning to the same culinary spot. These results align with the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), which posits that satisfaction and loyalty intentions are formed when perceived product quality meets or exceeds customer expectations.

This finding is consistent with Namkung and Jang (2007), who emphasized that high food quality directly enhances customer satisfaction and trust, ultimately fostering loyalty and repeat visitation. Similarly, Iradawati (2024) found that food and beverage quality significantly influences purchase decisions at culinary centers in Surabaya, which are closely tied to repeat visits. Supporting evidence also comes from Gumay and Siahaan (2022), who found that quality perception—particularly in culinary offerings—was a critical determinant of tourists' revisit intentions to the Floating Market in Lembang.

However, some studies have presented alternative perspectives. Lin and Mattila (2010) argue that food quality alone may not always be the most influential factor; in some contexts, environmental aspects such as dining atmosphere, customer service, and price promotions may play a more dominant role. These findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach in managing culinary destinations, where food quality must be complemented by supporting factors to maximize return visits.

The practical implications of this study are highly relevant for the development of MSME-based culinary tourism. To enhance revisit intention, business operators must go beyond offering tasty and hygienic food. They should ensure consistency in taste, foster innovation in food presentation, and deliver a unique culinary identity. Strengthening culinary quality not only enhances customer loyalty but also improves the competitive positioning of the destination in the culinary tourism landscape, thereby contributing to sustainable local economic growth.

d. Emotional Experience as a Mediator Between Culinary Quality and Revisit Intention

The results of this study confirm that emotional experience significantly mediates the relationship between culinary quality and revisit intention in the context of culinary tourism. Although culinary quality directly influences tourists' intention to revisit, its impact is considerably enhanced when accompanied by a positive emotional response. In other words, favorable perceptions of taste, presentation, and food hygiene are insufficient without the presence of emotional dimensions such as satisfaction, joy, comfort, and memorable experiences that occur during the visit.

These findings align with the Experience Economy Theory proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which emphasizes that modern consumers seek not merely products but meaningful and emotionally engaging experiences. In the context of culinary destinations, emotional experiences foster affective attachment to the location, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat visits. Hosany and Gilbert (2010) also asserted that positive emotions are a strong predictor of satisfaction and repeat visitation in the tourism sector. Similarly, Chen and Hu (2010) found that emotional experience plays a significant mediating role between service quality and customer loyalty in the culinary industry.

Further support comes from Tsai and Wang (2017), who discovered that tourists' emotional responses to traditional food perceptions significantly boost revisit intentions. Thus, superior culinary quality facilitates the emergence of positive emotional experiences, which in turn serve as a key driver of loyalty and behavioral intention. Conversely, some studies suggest that culinary quality alone may directly influence revisit intentions, especially among more functionally oriented customers, such as those in fast-food settings (Lin & Mattila, 2010). However, in experience-based tourism such as culinary travel, emotional engagement becomes a critical point of differentiation.

These insights have important implications for culinary tourism development. MSME actors and culinary center managers must recognize that fostering emotional experiences—through ambient atmosphere, warm social interactions, and compelling food storytelling—can significantly enhance tourists' perceptions and loyalty. This approach not only supports individual business growth but also strengthens the collective competitiveness and sustainability of culinary tourism destinations, thereby contributing to regional economic resilience and recovery.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that culinary quality has a significant positive effect on emotional experience, which in turn mediates the relationship between culinary quality and revisit intention. Although the direct effect of culinary quality on revisit intention was relatively modest, its indirect effect through emotional experience proved to be strong and statistically significant. These findings underscore the pivotal role of emotional experience in bridging consumers' quality perceptions with their behavioral loyalty within the context of culinary tourism.

In light of these results, it is recommended that culinary tourism managers and MSME stakeholders not only enhance food quality—through taste, presentation, and hygiene—but also cultivate emotionally engaging experiences. This can be achieved by creating pleasant atmospheres, delivering attentive service, and fostering memorable social interactions. Such strategies are essential for developing affective attachment, which ultimately increases the intention to revisit.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. It was conducted exclusively at a single site Surabaya's Culinary Tourism Center limiting the generalizability of the findings to other culinary destinations. Moreover, the use of a quantitative approach combined with purposive sampling may have restricted the depth and variability of the collected data. Future research is therefore recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, expand the geographic scope of investigation, and apply more representative sampling techniques to enhance the comprehensiveness and applicability of the results.

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