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THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY, THEMATIC REPRESENTATION AND HERITAGE ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY: A STUDY ON TOURISM-DESTINED FOOD OUTLETS

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Wpływ pochodzenia etnicznego, reprezentacji tematycznej i dziedzictwa na lojalność klientów: badanie punktów gastronomicznych przeznaczonych dla turystów

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na roli stylu życia, nawyków żywieniowych i pochodzenia etnicznego mieszkańców regionu Dżammu w kształtowaniu powtarzalnych zachowań związanych z wyborem restauracji. W obszernym przeglądzie literatury trend spożywania posiłków poza domem z rodziną wzrósł i pobudził przedsiębiorczość restauracyjną. Kilka badań ponownie odzwierciedliło związek między pochodzeniem etnicznym, reprezentacją tematyczną i dziedzictwem. Jak wspomniano, w literaturze brakuje informacji na temat lojalności i preferencji kulinarnych klientów w kontekście Indii, dlatego niniejsze badanie koncentruje się na lokalnej ludności i jej lojalności wobec ulubionych restauracji w oparciu o ich pochodzenie etniczne i kulturę, starając się uzupełnić istniejącą literaturę, a także zrozumieć wpływ wspomnianych zmiennych na lojalność rdzennej ludności Dżammu. Aby zbadać symetrię i rozkład danych, stwierdzono, że skośność i kurtoza

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mieszczą się w granicach. Opracowano kwestionariusz, który należało przeanalizować w SmartPLS, a także zbadać powszechne błędy metodyczne i niezawodność opracowanego narzędzia. Wszystkie wartości okazały się mieścić w zakresie. Na koniec, w celu przetestowania hipotez, przeprowadzono analizę regresji wielokrotnej, która wykazała, że uzyskane wartości są istotne statystycznie.

Słowa kluczowe: pochodzenie etniczne, dziedzictwo, punkty gastronomiczne, lojalność klientów, gościnność.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of lifestyle, eating habits and ethnicity of the people of Jammu region influencing repeat behaviour towards the choice of restaurants. Taking into account an extensive literature review, the trend of dining out with one's family has increased and boosted restaurant entrepreneurship. A few studies revealed the relationship between Ethnicity, Thematic Representation and Heritage. As mentioned, there is a lack of information in the literature regarding the customers' loyalty and their culinary preferences in the context of India, hence this study targets the local population and their loyalty towards their favourite restaurants based on their ethnicity and culture in an attempt to contribute to the existing literature and also to understand the influence of the said variables on the loyalty of the indigenous population of Jammu. In order to examine the symmetry and distribution of data, skewness and kurtosis were found well within the limits. An administered questionnaire was developed and run through SmartPLS in addition to examining the common method bias and reliability of the instrument developed. All the values were found to be well within the range. Finally, to test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was run and the values obtained were found to be statistically significant.

Keywords: ethnicity, heritage, food outlets, customer loyalty, hospitality.

Introduction

An increase in the number of people who prefer to dine out has met with an equating response from the restaurant and eatery business. The present generation has shown an exponential increase in the number of diners who prefer to dine out on every occasion possible (Jin et al., 2015). As mentioned, due to an increment in the number of diners, there exists a massive competition among the eateries that are competing to retain and increase the number of patrons to sustain in this dynamic business which is influenced by the return behaviour of the customer, which is inclusive of plethora of cultural factors (Williams et al., 2010). People's preference for cuisine depends on their likes and dislikes which in turn is dependent on the value system, thinking and beliefs they have developed in years of their upbringing and social interaction (Ansari & Singh, 2023). The reputation of a restaurant highly depends on the loyalty of its patrons. Restaurant businesses have long relied on the taste of the food they are serving to the guests and it is important to remain in the business. People cherish the food they are aware of. Ethnicity plays a vital role in influencing their choice of eateries (Festivalia et al., 2017). To keep in the race of this business, it is imperative

to understand and analyse the needs of the prospective customers keeping in mind their culture and ethnicity. Just like the taste of food is important so is the understanding of customer loyalty from the perspective of physical environment and tradition (Zhang et al., 2019). Kivela & Crotts (2006) express a need for inclusion of these aspects into studies on restaurant marketing that aims customer loyalty. They further highlight that tourists prefer and enjoy the food and beverage of their choice served to them in a restaurant that reminds them of their ethnicity and culture. Adding unique characteristics to the outlet is not only beneficial to ensure revisiting of the existing customers but it also attracts new ones. Repeat purchase intention of the customer or the revisit to the outlet can be ensured by giving an everlasting culinary experience to the customer. The same is significantly influenced by the use of authentic recipes, cooking style, and presentation. An edge over the competitors can be gained by improving on the authenticity of food and ambience of the restaurant. This would retain the existing clientele and attract new customers (Lai et al., 2013). For ensuring the existence of hospitality establishments, one must take into account customer satisfaction. Attracting new clientele can be expensive up to five times more than keeping the existing ones. Fulfilling expectations sets the satisfaction levels of the restaurant and further experiences keep them elevated (Ansari et al., 2024). In other words, high levels of satisfaction among patrons must always be a central concern for any hotel model that seeks lasting profitability, increased sales and improved competitive positioning. What is particularly important for the restaurant is the quality of the environment and food, making both customers satisfied and the brand image positive. Price fairness does not affect brand image though it contributes to satisfaction levels among buyers. In addition to brand image, good services are also vital for the restaurant businesses seeking guest satisfaction. In today's highly competitive hospitably industry, restaurants have emerged as popular eating places that do not only offer food but experiences too. Instead of just dining, they provide customers with immersion settings, decoration in line with a given theme, as well as moments to remember (Ansari et al., 2023). This is important for the general performance of theme restaurants since it helps them understand how customer satisfaction level could be improved. The likelihood that satisfied customers will return not only boosts the profits of a business at the moment but also has critical effects on how much the company will continue making afterwards. In this regard, both owners and supervisors of restaurants need to know what motivates clients' satisfaction in these firms as the most important aspect.

The role of culture and ethnicity

Ethnicity and customer loyalty

Being convinced to return to a service provider after being overwhelmingly contented by the quality of service provided to the customer is loyalty (Zameer et al., 2019). In the service business, world customer loyalty is the apex factor of importance as it usually is the goal of a service-providing business, which sustains and thrives in business just by orienting itself with the focus on the same. Especially in the mushrooming and thriving dynamic business of ever-increasing eateries and restaurants, a business that focuses on the loyalty of customers and patronage of the customers sails through the toughest of the competitions (Irianto & Kartikasari, 2020).

Customer loyalty is very important and always remains as the resultant expression of the customer's content. A restaurant that satisfies the lifestyle needs of the customer may prove to be a favourable place to dine in his or her opinion thus, needs would influence the opinions of the customer (Singh & Ansari, 2024). While studying customer loyalty, the study of behavioural evaluation among diverse ethnic groups has gained pace lately, indicating its importance (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Cultural ethnicity behavioural and mental likeness of a group of people makes them different from others. Thus, ethnicity plays a vital role in influencing customer loyalty, which can be derived as a corollary from Hofstede's study which defined that people from the same ethnicity would be comfortable and cohesive with each other and would share common preferences. Huang & Crotts (2019) suggest that people with like minds would get positively influenced by the preferences that were set according to their ethnicity and would display negative or restrictive behaviours when exposed to service styles of a different ethnicity, which would otherwise be welcomed by people belonging to the same place. This would imply that irrespective of the location the customer would prefer the service styles from the place of their origin, be it about their eating habits or joining people from the same origin to dine with. Thus, we propose:

Thematic representation and customer loyalty

Thematic representation encapsulates the favourability of the atmosphere of a place and its décor (Bitner, 1990). The guests' perception of the environment he or she is subjected to influences their repeat buying behaviour (Shamah et al., 2018). The décor and ambience impact customer loyalty significantly and the better the ambience, the more favourite the restaurant becomes (Ryu et al., 2012). The better the physical environment of a restaurant, the more favourably it is perceived as and consequently; the customer will become more loyal to the

restaurant. Amofah et al. (2016) explained the physical atmosphere as a superset of cleanliness of décor, floor and room and appropriate decoration and temperature. Cao & Kim (2015) also add the staff attire to this. All of this tends to influence the customer's feelings (Chen & Lee, 2018). When the question is about dining and food, food quality and tastes are the fundamental markers. However, to influence the repeat purchase behaviour of a customer, having a soothing, comfortable and pleasant atmosphere is additionally vital (Wall & Berry, 2007). Customers return to a place that appeals to them aesthetically, which includes a great ambience, creative, beautiful and spatial design and layout and thematically appropriate decorations and artefacts (Bitner, 1990). Revisit intentions of the customers are positively influenced by the pleasant and welcoming environment of the restaurant. Thus, we propose:

Heritage and customer loyalty

The term "heritage" encompasses a broad range of items (food, handicrafts and artefacts), sites (theme restaurants, locations), and traditions (cooking styles, occasions), both physical and non-physical, that pass down the line from one generation group to the others. Historic structures, objects, cultural practices and landscapes have meaning and worth. They hold value and importance for a certain group of people. This fact defines these things as cultural heritage assets. Various areas and destinations are highlighting their heritage to attract more and more customers for tourism purposes so that the inflow of customers or guests increases and helps create loyal customers towards the destination (Mo et al., 2023). To create a loyal customer, the heritage should offer a rich mixture of flora and fauna, history and diverse culture (Dassanayake, 2022). Customer needs and desires can also lead to customer loyalty when the satisfaction level is achieved. It can be either through traditional values, authentic food items or culture. The customer, if they get disappointed once, then they may not return and a negative word of mouth will lead to other customer loss also. To create a brand value, one must adhere to traditional values, culture and authenticity. Places which are associated with heritage or provide insight into a cultural heritage attract more customers and thus help create loyal customers in the future. Heritage (traditional food, cooking styles, theme representations, occasions, etc.) offers the customers insight into cultural values so that they can understand and feel the actual atmosphere of the place (McIntosh, 1999). Heritage showcases a destination's historical culture and serves as a means to attract visitors to cities. To attract more and more customers or to create loyal customers, the manager of a particular place must promote the outlet or place as promotion helps in attracting customers. The steps taken by outlet managers help create loyal customers and also increase the competition on the market to promote destination and culture.

Research gap and relevance

Service quality has been a major identifying factor for customer loyalty as far as food outlet business is concerned (Zameer et al., 2019; Irianto & Kartikasari, 2020). It is Kivela & Crotts (2006) who mention that there is a requirement to explore the effects of ethnicity on the loyalty of customers as this is a novel and developing research horizon in this field. In addition to this, people belonging to a common ethnicity patronize a particular restaurant (Huang & Crotts, 2019).

The customer usually repeats their visit to the restaurants that offer comfortable environment to dine (Bitner, 1990; Shamah et al., 2018). Ryu et al. (2012) specify that the restaurant ambience positively and significantly affects the loyalty of the customer, which is supported by the fact that favourable physical environment attracts the customers (Amofah et al., 2016). Various studies direct the attention towards the comfortability, pleasantness, creativity and attire of the servers and the positive effects of the same on customer loyalty (Chen & Lee, 2018; Wall & Berry, 2007). The comfortability of the environment leaves the scope to research the effect of thematic representation of the food outlet on customer loyalty. Highlighting the destination, offering a mix of history and diverse culture attracts customers (Dassanayake, 2022; Mo et al., 2023). McIntosh (1999) also provides an insight into this topic as integrating heritage with food and atmosphere gives an authentic experience to the customer. The portrayal of heritage includes food cooking styles, artefacts, etc. Various components of heritage are included by food outlet owners to attract customers as described in studies, which paves the way for the research on the effects of heritage on customer loyalty.

Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Ethnicity significantly affects customer loyalty.

H2: Thematic representation significantly affects customer loyalty.

H3: Heritage significantly affects customer loyalty.

This study describes and investigates the effect of various aspects of culture on the customer loyalty. This paper explores the effects of ethnicity, thematic representation and heritage on the loyalty of the customers who are the patrons of particular food outlets. This study encompasses the physical attributes of the restaurant by means of thematic representation, and tradition by means of heritage, thus, adding value to the earlier literature by addressing the questions arising from the gaps mentioned by Shamah et al. (2018) and Kivela & Crotts (2006) who state that physical attributes, ethnicity and culture should be studied in order to understand customer loyalty for sustenance of restaurants in the business.

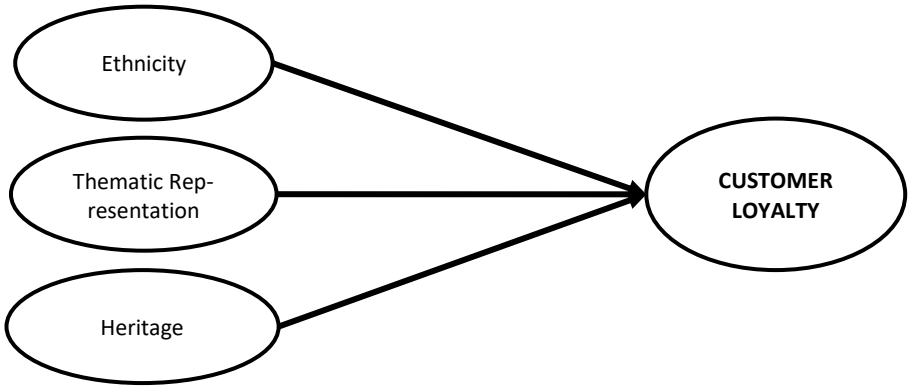


Figure 1
Conceptual model of study
Source: prepared by the authors

Research methodology

Sampling and data collection

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the influence of ethnicity, culture, customs and traditions, and heritage on customer loyalty in various food outlets in Jammu and Kashmir, India. A vast number of people prefer to dine out as a recent trend. It is practically better to identify a set of prospective respondents. Since the population of respondents is unidentified so non-probability sampling is used (Acharya et al., 2013). A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling is utilized to capture responses from respondents of the study areas. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 362 respondents in various food outlets of the study area. Hence the response rate was 77.07%. A total of 279 data entries were collected, out of which 224 data entries were error-free. For the PLS-SEM analysis, sample sizes of 251, 155, and 113 are typically regarded as sufficient; precise appropriateness varies according to the model's complexity and the required degree of statistical power. The sample size should be at least ten times the number of outer model linkages pointing to any latent variable. According to a commonly accepted rule of thumb, the sample size of 224 is an acceptable range for the PLS-SEM (Putu Gede Subhaktiyasa, 2024; Fauzi, 2022). This method is chosen based on the logical choice made as the fact that the respondents were repeat customers of the eateries. The questionnaire was prepared from relevant literature and primary data was collected by a survey method that enables a researcher to collect relevant responses (Goundar, 2012).

Table 1
Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic variables		n = 224	Percent
Gender	Male	164	73.21
	Female	60	26.78
Age	18 - 24	79	35.26
	25 - 34	52	23.21
	35 - 44	35	15.26
	45 - 54	33	14.73
	55 & above	25	11.16
Material status	Single	155	69.19
	Married	69	30.80
Education	High School	68	30.35
	Bachelor's Degree	59	26.33
	Master's Degree	45	20.08
	Professional Degree	23	10.26
	Others	29	12.94
Annual income	up to 10 lakhs	82	36.60
	10 – 14 lakhs	67	29.91
	15 – 19 lakhs	45	20.08
	20 –24 lakhs	18	8.03
	25 lakhs or more	12	5.35

Source: prepared by the authors

Data analysis and results

Measurement model

Table 2 presents the measuring model's results based on the PLS method. Internal consistency and convergent validity are assessed in light of the investigation's findings. While average variance extracted (AVE) is used to compute convergent validity, composite reliability (CR) is used to measure internal consistency. Fornell & Larcker (1981) proposed that the value of CR should be at least 0.7 in order to establish internal consistency. An AVE value of less than 0.5 is undesirable since it cannot explain more than half of the variation by item or variable (Henseler et al., 2009). In order to get at an AVE value of 0.5, a number of variables are removed.

Table 2
Measurement model

Constructs	Indicator Items	Loading	AVE	CR
Customer Loyalty	C1	0.801	0.586	0.886
	C2	0.745		
	C3	0.803		
	C4	0.739		
	C5	0.787		
	C6	0.676		
	C7	0.796		
Ethnicity	E1	0.775	0.701	0.934
	E2	0.884		
	E3	0.867		
	E4	0.780		
	E5	0.879		
	E6	0.822		
	E7	0.848		
Heritage	H1	0.887	0.744	0.946
	H2	0.878		
	H3	0.887		
	H4	0.944		
	H5	0.940		
	H6	0.777		
	H7	0.697		
Thematic Representation	TR1	0.855	0.819	0.966
	TR2	0.909		
	TR3	0.907		
	TR4	0.945		
	TR5	0.930		
	TR6	0.905		
	TR7	0.883		

Note: AVE – average variance extracted, CR – composite reliability.
Source: the authors' own work

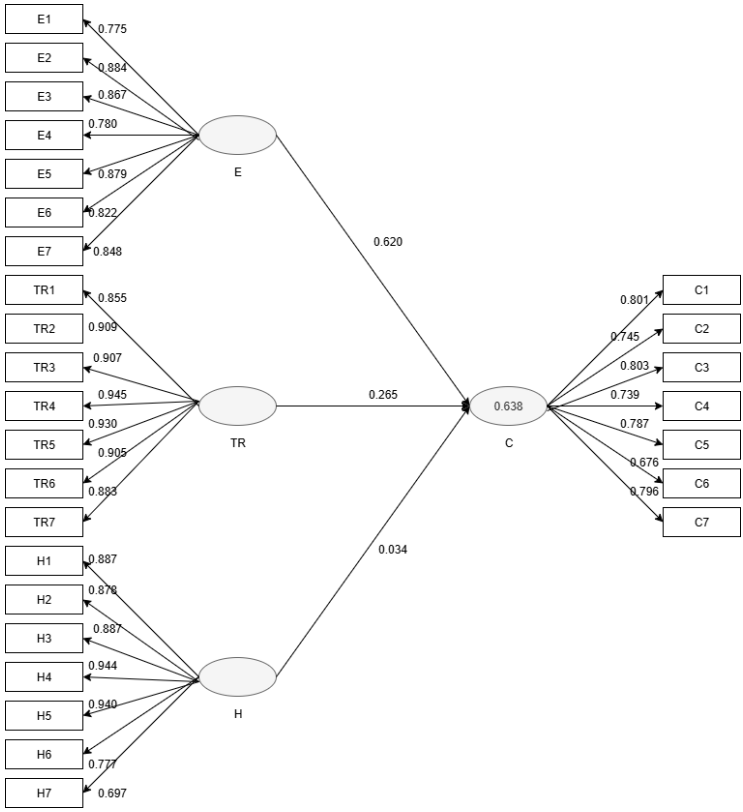
Composite Reliability (CR): Composite Reliability, also known as construct reliability, measures the consistency between related items within a scale, similar to Cronbach's alpha. The metric helps assess the reliability and coherence of the scale items (Netemeyer et al., 2003). The value of internal consistency among constructs should be greater than or equal to 0.7 (CR ≥ 0.7) (Hair et al.,

2021). Table 2 depicts that the constructs are reliable as their value is greater than 0.7, as prescribed by Hair et al. (2021).

Table 3
Discriminant validity

Construct	Customer Loyalty	Ethnicity	Heritage	Thematic Repre-sentation
Customer Loyalty	0.765			
Ethnicity	0.764	0.837		
Heritage	0.587	0.778	0.863	
Thematic Representa-tion	0.549	0.443	0.270	0.905

Source: the authors' own work



Note: E – Ethnicity, TR – Thematic Representation, H – Heritage, C – Customer Loyalty

Figure 2
Structural model result
Source: the author's own work

Discriminant Validity (DV): Discriminant validity is shown by proofs that measure ideas which are not supposed to be strongly linked, and have low connections. In real tests, discriminant validity numbers should be lower in worth compared to convergent validity numbers (Hubley, 2014). The value of a measure of distinction between constructs should be greater than 0.5. It is acceptable when: AVE > 0.5 AVE > MSV (Chauhan, 2015). As per the table above, it is found that the value of all constructs in case of composite reliability (CR) is > 0.7, which denotes it to be significantly reliable as it suffices the value which is ≥ 0.7 as given by Hair et al. (2021).

Table 4
Results of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	t-statistics	p-value	Decision
E > C	0.632	0.102	6.107	0.000	Supported
H > C	0.026	0.099	0.342	0.732	Not supported
TR > C	0.265	0.083	3.202	0.001	Supported

Source: the authors' own work

In this study, three hypotheses were developed and tested. According to Pangarso et al. (2020) the p-value should be less than 0.05 and the t-statistics value should be higher than 1.96 (using a 5% confidence level). Two hypotheses were found to be supported with p-value less than 0.05. The impact of ethnicity (H1) on customer loyalty turned out to be significant. Similarly, thematic representation (H2) has a significant influence on customer loyalty. On the contrary, the study shows that heritage (H3) does not impact customer loyalty in a significant way.

Scope for future research

This study relies on self-reported metrics from a particular geographic area (such as a city or tourism sector), so its results may not be as generalizable as planned. The impact of thematic differences might be isolated in future studies using experimental (between-group) designs Likewise, behavioural outcomes (real revisit or referral) could be validated through longitudinal tracking. Furthermore, comparing establishments that represent various ethnic groups and locations known as cross-cultural validation would help clarify how novelty-seeking or familiarity bias modulates outcomes.

Cross-Cultural Comparison: It is important to look at how customer loyalty differs between cultural groups in Jammu. We should explore the effects of fac-

tors like language, religion, and income levels. These intersect with cultural values to shape loyalty behaviour in unique ways.

Qualitative Exploration: Speak to customers from different backgrounds. Ask them questions about their experiences with hospitality services. Do they like the service? Do they trust the company? Find out! Learn about their culture. See how their culture impacts their views of satisfaction and loyalty.

Longitudinal Studies: Studies need to be done over time to see changes in customer loyalty. How do cultural shifts, politics, and the economy in Jammu affect loyalty? Tracking this gives key insights into how diverse cultures impact customer behaviour. Research can gain insight by studying how culture, ethnicity, and customer loyalty interact in Jammu's hospitality sector. This understanding can lead to better marketing tactics and services tailored for varied customer groups. The study covers significant areas that aid in this deeper understanding.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes how ethnicity, cultural heritage, and theme representation significantly impact patron loyalty in restaurants business that cater to tourists. The results show that patrons are captivated by culinary offerings but they are also greatly impacted by the authenticity and cultural stories they include. When carefully included into food service settings, ethnic identity and cultural components strengthen perceived authenticity, create emotional bonds, and make for a more engaging eating experience. Furthermore, thematic representation through staff presentation, menu design, and décor is an essential means of reaffirming cultural narrative and identity, which strengthens client interaction and encourages repeat business. The study examined ethnicity, themes, and tradition's effects on customer loyalty. We found that ethnicity and thematic representation significantly influence customer loyalty while heritage does not support customer loyalty to the same extent. This highlights cultural factors' importance when understanding and boosting loyalty on a market. Going ahead, businesses should adopt strategies respecting and reflecting their customers' cultural diversity to build stronger relationships and sustained loyalty with them. Although background, ethnicity, and theme representation can have a big impact on consumer loyalty, how honestly and respectfully organizations use these factors in their marketing and customer service determines how much of an impact they have. In an increasingly varied marketplace, brands may foster stronger emotional connections, improve consumer loyalty, and achieve sustainable success by comprehending and embracing cultural variety. Since this study reveals the significance of ethnicity and thematic representation on the customers' loyalty towards their preferred restaurant, these can be used as pro-

motional tools by various stakeholders. Marketers can focus on specific ethnic groups to develop promotional materials for the restaurant that can attract people's patronage (Osti & Goffi, 2021). By doing so, they can either explore an unexplored niche market with ethnic décor and cuisine as demanded or can attract clientele that have the same demands. Authorities that are responsible for making policies and tourist operators can play their role in encouraging customer engagement through promoting ethnically driven food fests and other events (Jang et al., 2012). This practice can attract different ethnic groups and hence boost the restaurant business by means of improving loyalty. Thematic representation which is mostly inclined towards the décor of the restaurant that makes the clientele comfortable can be an efficient tool for the restaurant managers. The managers can plan the layout and décor in a manner that depicts the dining ambience and culture of the ethnic group in focus. This practice can stimulate the nostalgia and infuse belongingness in the diners, significantly influencing their perception of comfort and loyalty (Kim & Jang, 2016). Thus, ethnicity and thematic representation can become important ingredients beginning with the policy making and finishing with the restaurant décor. This can enhance the restaurant businesses catering to ethnic clientele by attracting new diners and also strengthening the loyalty of existing ones. Thematic representation, such as interior design, music, staff outfits, and traditions, enhances the perceived authenticity of the food and the dining experience as a whole rather than serving as decoration. Through a favourable image, this synergy reinforces loyalty by increasing the experience of fulfilment beyond what either menu or ambient quality alone might offer. Structural equation modelling and reviews of related evidence offer the findings leading to major insights.

STATEMENT OF ETHICS

This study was conducted in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the School of Hotel Management & Tourism, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, India.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *The Impact of Ethnicity, Thematic Representation and Heritage on Customer Loyalty: a Study on Tourism-Destined Food Outlets.*

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Parambir Singh: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review.
Amrik Singh: Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Writing – Original draft, Conclusion.
Amjad Imam Ansari: Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – Original draft.
Amanjeet Bhalla: Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original draft

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