







“Customer engagement in Acehnese traditional restaurants: Mediating effects on revisit intention and e-WOM”

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ARTICLE INFO Mahdani Ibrahim, Halimatussakdiah Halimatussakdiah, M. Ridha Siregar, Ghrina Zikran, Rido Amalia and Dicky Pratama Putra (2025). Customer engagement in Acehnese traditional restaurants: Mediating effects on revisit intention and e-WOM. *Innovative Marketing*, 21(2), 211-224. doi:[10.21511/im.21\(2\).2025.17](https://doi.org/10.21511/im.21(2).2025.17)

DOI [http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.21\(2\).2025.17](http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.21(2).2025.17)

RELEASED ON Friday, 13 June 2025

RECEIVED ON Wednesday, 04 December 2024

ACCEPTED ON Tuesday, 20 May 2025

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JOURNAL "Innovative Marketing "

ISSN PRINT 1814-2427

ISSN ONLINE 1816-6326

PUBLISHER LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

FOUNDER LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

45



NUMBER OF FIGURES

2



NUMBER OF TABLES

7

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 4th of December, 2024
Accepted on: 20th of May, 2025
Published on: 13th of June, 2025

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Conflict of interest statement:
Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN ACEHNESE TRADITIONAL RESTAURANTS: MEDIATING EFFECTS ON REVISIT INTENTION AND E-WOM

Abstract

This study examines the influence of restaurant attributes on customer engagement with traditional food products (TFP), and how this engagement affects revisit intention and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Conducted from January to September 2024 in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, Indonesia, the study surveyed 160 customers who had dined at traditional Acehese restaurants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that Food Quality ($\beta = 0.323$; $p < 0.001$), Staff Service ($\beta = 0.256$; $p < 0.001$), Health Involvement ($\beta = 0.219$; $p = 0.013$), and Involvement in Luxury ($\beta = 0.282$; $p < 0.001$) significantly enhance TFP Engagement. In contrast, Convenience Orientation does not show a significant effect. Moreover, TFP Engagement strongly predicts Intention to Revisit ($\beta = 0.877$; $p < 0.001$) and positive e-WOM ($\beta = 0.757$; $p < 0.001$), acting as a mediator between restaurant attributes and customer behavioral outcomes.

Keywords traditional food, quality, service, health, engagement, intention, e-WOM, PLS

JEL Classification L26, L83, M31

INTRODUCTION

Traditional food plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of identity among communities. In many regions, including Indonesia's Aceh Province, traditional cuisine is more than just a source of sustenance; it represents a deep-rooted cultural legacy passed down through generations. Acehese traditional food, characterized by its rich flavors, unique ingredients, and historical significance, has become a key attraction in the region's culinary tourism. However, as the culinary industry evolves, traditional food businesses face challenges in maintaining customer loyalty and sustaining long-term engagement.

One of the critical factors influencing customer retention in traditional food businesses is customer involvement, which encompasses both emotional and cognitive dimensions. Customer involvement reflects the level of personal relevance and engagement that individuals associate with a product or experience. In the context of traditional food, involvement can shape consumer behavior, influencing not only satisfaction and emotional attachment but also revisit intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication. While extensive research has explored consumer behavior in general food service in-

dustries, limited studies have specifically examined the mechanisms through which traditional food attribute, such as food quality, health consciousness, cultural authenticity, and service excellence, shape customer involvement and, subsequently, their behavioral responses.

This research problem is particularly significant in Aceh, where traditional food businesses compete not only with modern dining establishments but also with the increasing demand for diverse culinary experiences driven by globalization. Understanding how customer involvement in traditional food influences revisit intentions and e-WOM is essential for developing effective strategies to sustain customer loyalty. However, existing studies have yet to fully address the underlying mechanisms of these relationships, leaving a gap in knowledge regarding the factors that drive customer engagement in traditional food experiences.

Addressing this issue requires a scientific inquiry into the specific determinants of customer involvement in Acehnese traditional food and how these factors contribute to revisit intentions and e-WOM. By bridging this research gap, the study advances the discourse on consumer behavior in culinary tourism and provides a deeper understanding of the role of traditional food in fostering customer engagement and loyalty.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the factors influencing customer engagement in traditional food experiences is essential for both academia and practitioners. Various studies have explored the role of food quality, service, and ambiance in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hanaysha, 2016; Ryu & Lee, 2013). However, the interplay of these elements within the context of Traditional Food Participation (TFP) remains underexplored. This section synthesizes existing literature to build a theoretical foundation for the study, highlighting key determinants of TFP engagement and its impact on revisit intention and e-WOM.

Convenience in using a product or service is frequently linked to an individual's perception of ease and efficiency in the processes of acquisition, preparation, and utilization, including traditional foods (Olsen et al., 2021; Pieniak et al., 2009). Convenience encapsulates how swiftly and effortlessly traditional food can be accessed and prepared, directly affecting consumer decision-making. When faced with various choices, customers often prioritize convenience factors such as practicality and simplicity (Haryanto et al., 2019). Enhanced accessibility positively influences consumer perceptions, ultimately shaping preferences and fostering loyalty (Harcar & Yucelt, 2012).

Food quality encompasses multiple dimensions, including presentation, menu diversity, taste, and ingredient freshness (Hanaysha, 2016). These elements are instrumental in shaping consumer perceptions of food products, with superior quality often leading to higher satisfaction levels (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Qin & Prybutok, 2009). The research underscores that food quality significantly affects customer satisfaction and behaviors, such as intentions to revisit and recommend a restaurant to others (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Higher food quality enhances a restaurant's capacity to attract and retain patrons, while also strengthening customer engagement with the establishment (Ryu et al., 2012). When customers perceive a high-quality dining experience, they are more likely to develop an emotional connection with the restaurant, fostering loyalty, repeat visits, and positive recommendations (Ryu & Lee, 2013).

Traditional foods often positioned as luxury products are typically priced higher than non-luxury alternatives (Dubois et al., 2005). This aligns with the notion that luxury foods deliver exceptional flavors alongside a sense of exclusivity and prestige. Higher pricing reflects the superior quality and distinctiveness of these offerings, reinforcing their luxurious image and appealing to consumers seeking unique and exclusive culinary experiences (Shukla & Purani, 2012).

Consumer purchasing decisions and behaviors are heavily influenced by their overall evaluation of a product or service experience (Oliver, 1980).

A positive experience encourages repeat purchases, while a negative one deters future buying intentions. Moreover, customer satisfaction and loyalty – critical for business success – are largely shaped by the quality of service provided (Zhao & Huddleston, 2012). Exceptional service quality not only heightens customer satisfaction but also cultivates stronger loyalty, thereby enhancing the company's reputation and enabling customer retention and acquisition (Zhong & Moon, 2020).

Service quality extends beyond the products offered to include factors such as promptness and employee friendliness, which are crucial in shaping customer decisions, especially in restaurants (Chiciudean et al., 2019). Swift service and amicable staff significantly enhance customers' experiences. Such factors hold particular importance in service industries like hospitality, where direct customer interactions heavily influence perceptions of overall service quality. Businesses that consistently deliver fast, friendly, and high-quality service are more likely to achieve higher customer satisfaction, foster loyalty, and encourage repeat patronage (Ryu et al., 2012).

Health is closely tied to elements such as nutritious food, natural ingredients, and weight management (Olsen et al., 2021; Pieniak et al., 2009). Healthy food typically incorporates natural ingredients, is calorie-conscious, and supports a healthy lifestyle. Traditional foods, prepared with fresh ingredients and natural methods, offer substantial potential as healthy options for consumers. Additionally, cleanliness is a critical determinant in restaurant selection (Aksoydan, 2007). Hygiene plays a pivotal role in influencing customer choices, underscoring that cleanliness, alongside quality and taste, is highly valued by consumers (Chiciudean et al., 2019).

Health involvement has been found to positively influence preferences for traditional food products. Health-conscious consumers tend to select traditional food products, particularly those perceived as natural and healthy (Olsen et al., 2021). These products align with a balanced and sustainable lifestyle by utilizing minimally processed and natural ingredients. Overall, health considerations significantly affect consumer choices, particularly when selecting foods that promote long-term well-being (Yang et al., 2022).

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to online communication that conveys experiences or reviews regarding specific goods, services, or providers (Litvin et al., 2008). Customer experiences – positive or negative – play a pivotal role in shaping their intentions to continue using a service and influencing E-WOM formation. Satisfied customers are more inclined to share favorable experiences online, whereas negative encounters often result in adverse e-WOM (Abubakar et al., 2017). Retaining existing customers is more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. In addition to returning, satisfied customers frequently disseminate positive reviews via social media, blogs, and e-commerce platforms, thereby influencing potential customers' decisions (Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

In the hospitality and restaurant sectors, e-WOM has become an integral component of digital marketing strategies. It significantly shapes consumer perceptions and decisions, as increasing numbers of customers share and rely on online experiences (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Customer reviews and recommendations are instrumental in building the reputation of restaurants and hotels. Consequently, companies that foster positive customer experiences and encourage favorable e-WOM are better positioned to enhance loyalty and attract new patrons (Foroudi et al., 2021).

Engagement with Traditional Food Products (TFP) reflects the extent of customers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement with traditional foods (Zaichkowsky, 1994). This engagement encompasses interest, attention, and attachment, all of which influence consumption behavior and purchase decisions (Sheth et al., 1991). In the restaurant context, particularly those specializing in traditional cuisine, customer engagement is a vital competitive factor. Adopting a customer-centric approach by understanding needs and fostering deeper engagement can yield significant benefits (Meng & Choi, 2018).

Engagement also mediates the relationship between brand equity and behavioral intentions (Huang et al., 2017). For instance, customer engagement with traditional Acehnese eateries can enhance the connection between the restaurant's unique elements (e.g., authentic flavors, ambiance, cultural values) and customer behavioral intentions. Higher customer engagement with traditional foods increases

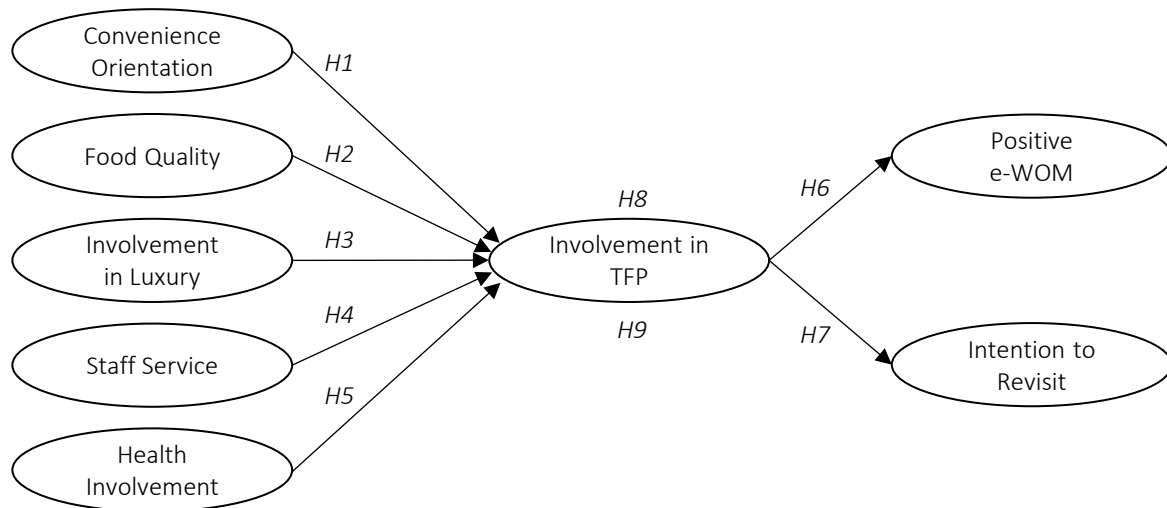


Figure 1. Research model

the likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations. By leveraging insights into the mediating role of TFP engagement, restaurants can refine their marketing strategies, focusing on factors that foster deeper connections with customers. This approach creates memorable experiences, enhancing loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

In summary, findings from prior research indicate that customers evaluate food quality through sensory attributes such as taste, texture, freshness, and aroma (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Liu & Tse, 2018; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Maintaining unique recipes is crucial to sustaining favorable consumer perceptions. Positive perceptions of food quality significantly influence engagement with traditional food products. Additionally, health involvement – driven by increased post-pandemic awareness of health and hygiene – plays a pivotal role in fostering engagement with traditional food (Chiciudean et al., 2019; Olsen et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, the perception of luxury dining reflects social values, encouraging repeat visits and favorable e-WOM (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Serra-Cantalops & Salvi, 2014; Foroudi et al., 2021). Lastly, comfort, including staff friendliness and ease of food preparation, enhances customer engagement (Chiciudean et al., 2019; Liu & Tse, 2018; Haryanto et al., 2019).

Based on these insights, this study aims to examine the role of restaurant elements in influencing engagement with TFP, as well as its subsequent effects on revisit intention and positive e-WOM.

The following hypotheses are proposed to examine the relationships between various factors and involvement in TFP. Specifically, these hypotheses explore how Convenience Orientation, Food Quality, Engagement in Luxury, Staff Service, and Health Involvement affects TFP Involvement, as well as the subsequent effects of TFP Involvement on Intention to Revisit and Positive e-WOM. Furthermore, the mediating role of TFP Involvement in the relationship between restaurant elements and these outcomes is also investigated:

- H1: Convenience Orientation positively influences Involvement in TFP.*
- H2: Food Quality has a positive impact on Involvement in TFP.*
- H3: Engagement in Luxury positively affects Involvement in TFP.*
- H4: Staff Service has a positive effect on Involvement in TFP.*
- H5: Health Involvement positively influences Involvement in TFP.*
- H6: Involvement in TFP positively affects the Intention to Revisit.*
- H7: Involvement in TFP has a positive effect on Positive e-WOM.*

H8: *Involvement in TFP mediates the relationship between restaurant elements and the Intention to Revisit.*

H9: *Involvement in TFP mediates the relationship between restaurant elements and Positive e-WOM.*

2. METHODOLOGY

This study applied a quantitative method using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among restaurant elements, customer engagement in Traditional Food Products (TFP), and behavioral outcomes. The study was conducted in two main cities in Aceh Province – Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar – chosen for their concentration of traditional Acehnese restaurants and cultural relevance to the study context. Data were collected from January to September 2024.

Table 1 presents the key demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study.

Table 1. Respondent demographics

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66.88
	Female	33.12
Age group	18-29 years	26.25
	30-39 years	45.62
	40-49 years	20.00
	≥50 years	8.13
	High school	18.75
Education	Diploma/Bachelor's	68.13
	Postgraduate	13.12
	Civil servant	35.62
Occupation	Private sector	28.12
	Entrepreneur	19.38
	Student/other	16.88
Monthly income	< IDR 5,000,000	26.25
	IDR 5–10 million	40.63
	> IDR 10 million	33.12
Visit frequency	1–3 times	48.13
	≥4 times	51.87

This demographic profile reflects a relatively educated and economically active population with high loyalty toward traditional dining establishments in Aceh.

2.1. Sampling and data collection

Purposive sampling was used to recruit 160 participants who had dined at traditional Acehnese restaurants at least once within the study period. Data were gathered using a structured, self-administered questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The selection of this sample size meets the requirement for minimum sample size estimation in PLS-SEM based on the inverse square root method (Kock, 2015; Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

2.2. Measurement instruments

The constructs in the questionnaire were adapted from prior validated studies:

- 1) Convenience Orientation: Candel (2001);
- 2) Food Quality: Ryu et al. (2012), Hanaysha (2016);
- 3) Luxury Involvement: Dubois et al. (2005), Shukla and Purani (2012);
- 4) Health Involvement: Olsen (2003), Pieniak et al. (2009);
- 5) Staff Service: Ryu et al. (2012), Qin and Prybutok (2009);
- 6) Engagement in TFP: Bell and Marshall (2003), Reynolds and Olson (2001);
- 7) Revisit Intention: Kim (2012);
- 8) Positive e-WOM: Wang et al. (2020), Adam et al. (2023).

A detailed description of the items and questionnaire is included in Appendix A (Table A1).

2.3. Ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical research principles involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were assured of data confidentiality and the right

to withdraw at any point. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Center for Tourism Marketing Communication and Creative Economy Research Ethics Committee at Syiah Kuala University.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 160 respondents from two major regions in Aceh Province, namely Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, with the majority residing in Aceh Besar (55.63%) compared to Banda Aceh (44.37%). The selected respondents were customers of Acehese traditional restaurants who had visited at least once between January and September 2024. Most respondents were male (66.88%), predominantly aged 30-39 years (45.62%), and held educational qualifications at the Diploma or Bachelor's degree level (68.13%). Most respondents reported a monthly income below IDR 10,000,000 (40.63%) and were employed as civil servants (35.62%).

A notable finding was customer loyalty, with more than half of the respondents (51.87%) having visited the restaurants four or more times. This data reflects a high level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, likely influenced by the quality of service, menu alignment with customer preferences, and a comfortable dining atmosphere. These findings suggest that Acehese traditional restaurants have successfully retained loyal customers while creating opportunities to attract new patrons by continually enhancing service quality and dining experiences.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments, reliability and validity tests were conducted. From the reliability test of the indicators, 32 indicators were found to be reliable, with outer loading values exceeding 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). All constructs met the criteria for construct validity, with Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.7 and composite reliability values ranging between 0.7 and 0.95. Additionally, convergent validity was confirmed, as the AVE values

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity

Variable	Indicator	Outer loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Convenience Orientation	CO1	0.910	0.918	0.942	0.802
	CO2	0.867			
	CO3	0.911			
	CO4	0.893			
Food Quality	FQ1	0.836	0.841	0.893	0.677
	FQ2	0.803			
	FQ3	0.813			
	FQ4	0.838			
Health Involvement	HI1	0.837	0.794	0.880	0.709
	HI2	0.887			
	HI4	0.801			
Intention to Revisit	ITR1	0.841	0.893	0.926	0.757
	ITR2	0.890			
	ITR3	0.855			
	ITR4	0.892			
Involvement in Luxury	IL1	0.852	0.775	0.870	0.690
	IL2	0.800			
	IL4	0.838			
Involvement in TFP	ITFP1	0.802	1.000	1.000	1.000
	ITFP2	0.890			
	ITFP3	0.888			
	ITFP4	0.918			
Positive e-WOM	E-WOM1	0.915	0.773	0.773	0.773
	E-WOM4	0.843			
Staff service	SS1	0.773	0.745	0.855	0.662
	SS2	0.831			
	SS4	0.836			

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio

	Convenience Orientation	Food Quality	Health Involvement	Intention to Revisit	Involvement in Luxury	Involvement in TFP	Positive e-WOM	Staff service
Convenience Orientation	0.896							
Food Quality	0.846	0.823						
Health Involvement	0.809	0.704	0.842					
Intention to Revisit	0.864	0.888	0.763	0.870				
Involvement in Luxury	0.801	0.757	0.686	0.842	0.831			
Involvement in TFP	0.839	0.855	0.787	0.877	0.829			
Positive e-WOM	0.823	0.822	0.631	0.824	0.712	0.757	0.879	
Staff service	0.837	0.813	0.741	0.873	0.759	0.851	0.765	0.814

exceeded 0.5, indicating that all variables were valid (Hair et al., 2019).

These test results are presented in Table 2, which provides an overview of the reliability and validity coefficients for all constructs, confirming that the research instruments are capable of consistently and accurately measuring the intended variables.

Subsequently, discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HT/MT), introduced by Henseler et al. (2017) as a more accurate method for assessing discriminant validity compared to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as also recommended by Hair et al. (2019). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. The threshold value applied was less than 0.90. Based on the findings, all HT/MT values were below 0.90, indicating that each indicator can distinctively measure its respective construct.

The external model successfully passed all reliability and validity tests, leading to the conclusion that all indicators in the model are both reliable and valid in measuring their respective constructs. Subsequently, the evaluation proceeded with an analysis of the internal model to assess the relationships among the established variables.

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in the structural model was analyzed to identify potential multicollinearity (Sarstedt et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2022). The analysis results indicated no evidence of collinearity among the constructs, as all VIF values were below 3, consistent with the recommended maximum threshold (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3 presents the results of the comparative analysis between R square and F square, aiming to assess the balance of the model. R-squared is used to measure the variance explained in each endogenous construct, serving as an indicator of the model's explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). R square values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are categorized as strong, moderate, and weak, respectively (Hair et al., 2019).

The adjusted R-squared results in Table 4 for Path Model I indicate that the variables Convenience Orientation, Food Quality, Health Involvement, Staff Service, and Involvement in Luxury collectively explain 76.9% (strong) of the variance in Intention to Revisit. In Path Model II, these variables explain 85.7% (strong) of the variance in Involvement in Traditional Food Products (TFP). Meanwhile, in Path Model III, these variables account for 57.3% (moderate) of the variance in Positive e-WOM.

Subsequently, F-squared is used to assess the relative impact of an influencing variable (exogenous) on the influenced variable (endogenous). According to Henseler (2017), F-squared values are categorized as small, moderate, and strong when less than 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively. The F-squared analysis reveals that Food Quality, Health Involvement, Staff Service, and Involvement in Luxury have a moderate influence on Involvement in TFP. Conversely, Convenience Orientation has a negligible influence, suggesting that this aspect is not a priority for traditional restaurant customers.

Involvement in TFP demonstrates a strong influence on both Intention to Revisit and Positive e-WOM. These findings highlight that emphasizing

food quality, cultural experiences, and customer service is a critical strategy for enhancing customer loyalty and expanding market reach through digital recommendations.

Table 4. Comparison of R-squared and F-squared

Inner model evaluation criteria	Value	Result
R-squared		
Intention to Revisit	0.769	Strong
Involvement in TFP	0.857	Strong
Positive e-WOM	0.573	Medium
F-squared		
Convenience Orientation → Involvement in TFP	0.003	Small
Food Quality → Involvement in TFP	0.176	Medium
Health Involvement → Involvement in TFP	0.110	Medium
Staff Service → Involvement in TFP	0.111	Medium
Involvement in Luxury → Involvement in TFP	0.178	Medium
Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	3.327	Strong
Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	1.344	Strong

Hypothesis testing was conducted to evaluate the relationships between variables in the study and to determine whether the proposed hypotheses were accepted or rejected. The testing process employed the bootstrapping method using a one-tailed test at a significance level of 0.05. A hypothesis is considered supported if the t-value exceeds 1.645. A summary of the hypothesis testing results is presented in Table 5.

This study analyzes various factors influencing customer involvement with traditional food products (Involvement in TFP) at traditional Acehese restaurants, as well as their impact on revisit intention (Intention to Revisit) and the spread of Positive E-WOM. The first finding indicates that Convenience Orientation does not have a significant effect on customer Involvement in TFP ($p = 0.648 > 0.05$). This suggests that convenience is

not a primary concern for customers at traditional Acehese restaurants, who are more interested in authentic experiences and distinctive flavors rather than service efficiency or physical comfort. In contrast, Food Quality has a significant positive effect on customer Involvement in TFP ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The quality of traditional Acehese food, such as the use of authentic spices and traditional cooking techniques, is a key factor in enhancing emotional customer involvement.

Additionally, Health Involvement was found to have a significant effect on customer involvement in TFP ($p = 0.013 < 0.05$). Traditional Acehese dishes that use natural ingredients and minimal preservatives, such as gulai ikan (fish curry) and sayur asam keu'ung (sour vegetables), appeal to health-conscious customers. The factor of Involvement in Luxury also demonstrated a significant positive effect on involvement in TFP ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Several traditional Acehese restaurants that blend traditional ambiance with modern comforts offer a unique and exclusive dining experience to customers. On the other hand, Staff Service also had a significant impact on customer involvement in TFP ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Friendly and informative staff service enhances the dining experience, strengthening customers' emotional involvement with traditional Acehese restaurants.

Customer Involvement in TFP has a significant effect on Intention to Revisit ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Customers who feel engaged with traditional Acehese dishes, such as gulai pliek u (vegetable curry with snail), gulai belangong (belangong curry), and mie Aceh (Aceh noodles), are more likely to have a strong intention to revisit. Similarly, customer involvement in TFP also has a signifi-

Table 5. Hypotheses test results

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics (O/STDEV)	p-values	Result
Convenience Orientation → Involvement in TFP	-0.052	-0.042	0.113	0.457	0.648	Not significant
Food Quality → Involvement in TFP	0.323	0.328	0.090	3.588	0.000	Significant
Health Involvement → Involvement in TFP	0.219	0.205	0.088	2489	0.013	Significant
Involvement in Luxury → Involvement in TFP	0.282	0.283	0.079	3.546	0.000	Significant
Staff Service → Involvement in TFP	0.256	0.251	0.080	3.217	0.001	Significant
Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	0.877	0.881	0.022	4.658	0.000	Significant
Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	0.757	0.765	0.045	16.839	0.000	Significant

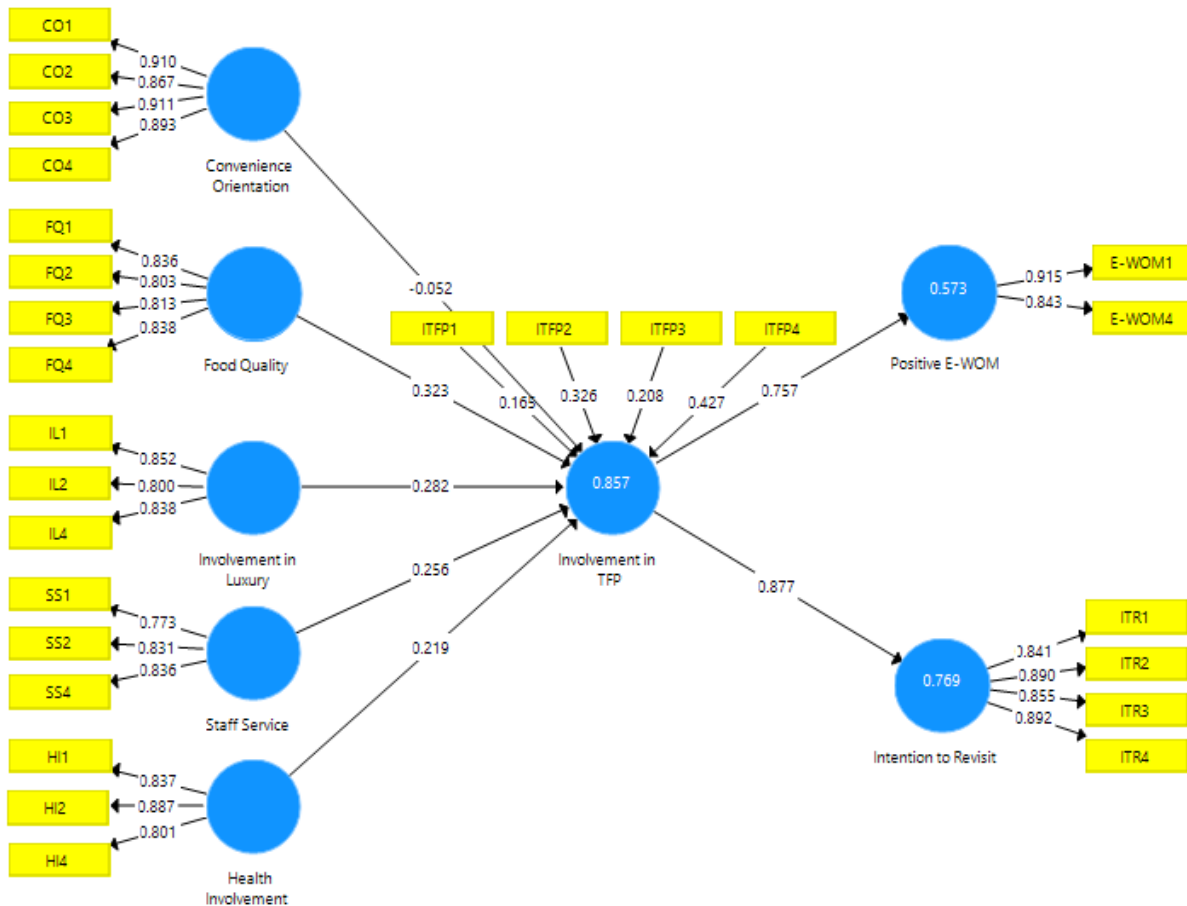


Figure 2. Research result model

cant impact on Positive e-WOM ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Customer satisfaction with traditional Acehese food encourages them to recommend the restaurant through social media and online reviews, positively influencing the restaurant’s reputation.

This highlights the importance for traditional Acehese restaurants to prioritize food quality, presentations that reflect local culture, and excellent staff service. Promoting health benefits and cultural uniqueness can attract customers who value these aspects. Additionally, restaurant managers can combine traditional elements with modern luxury to create a memorable dining experience, fostering customer loyalty and encouraging the spread of positive reviews on digital platforms. The research model is presented in Figure 2.

Indirect testing was conducted to evaluate and identify the mediating effects of the mediation variables within the model, by analyzing the standardized coefficients and t-values for each path

between the independent and dependent variables (Zhao et al., 2010; Nitzl et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2022) (see Table 6).

Customer engagement with Traditional Food Products (TFP) plays a crucial role as a mediator linking factors such as food quality, health consciousness, preference for luxury, and staff service with the intention to revisit and share positive online reviews (e-WOM). In the context of Acehese traditional eateries, this engagement is fostered through experiences rich in local culture, ranging from the authentic flavors of the food to the staff’s hospitality in sharing the stories behind the signature dishes. Emotionally engaged customers are more likely to develop loyalty, which motivates them to recommend the eatery to others.

However, engagement with TFP does not fully mediate the influence of comfort orientation on Intention to Revisit and Positive e-WOM. In the context of Acehese traditional eateries, physical comfort is

Table 6. Results of indirect influence analysis test

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics ((O/STDEV))	p-values	Result
Convenience Orientation → Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	-0.045	-0.037	0.100	0.455	0.649	Not significant
Food Quality → Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	0.283	0.289	0.080	3.563	0.000	Significant
Health Involvement → Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	0.192	0.180	0.077	2.501	0.013	Significant
Involvement in Luxury → Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	0.247	0.249	0.069	3.556	0.000	Significant
Staff Service → Involvement in TFP → Intention to Revisit	0.225	0.221	0.072	3.120	0.002	Significant
Convenience Orientation → Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	-0.039	-0.030	0.086	0.453	0.651	Significant
Food Quality → Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	0.245	0.252	0.073	3.334	0.001	Significant
Health Involvement → Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	0.166	0.155	0.065	2.545	0.011	Significant
Involvement in Luxury → Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	0.213	0.216	0.060	3.570	0.000	Significant
Staff Service → Involvement in TFP → Positive e-WOM	0.194	0.191	0.059	3.287	0.001	Significant

not the primary customer priority; rather, it is the authentic culinary experience and local culture. Therefore, restaurant managers should place greater emphasis on enhancing food quality, creating an atmosphere that reflects local culture, and providing friendly and informative service to strengthen customer loyalty and increase visibility through positive reviews on digital platforms.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the determinants of engagement in Traditional Food Participation (TFP) and its effects on Intention to Revisit and Positive e-WOM. The results indicate that Food Quality, Health Involvement, Involvement in Luxury, and Staff Service significantly influence engagement in TFP, which in turn affects Intention to Revisit and Positive e-WOM. In contrast, convenience orientation did not show a significant effect on TFP Engagement, suggesting that customers prioritize authenticity and experience over ease of access when it comes to traditional food.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the critical role of food quality in customer engagement and behavioral intentions (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Ryu & Lee, 2013). The positive effect of health involvement is consistent with Olsen et al. (2021), who found that health-conscious consumers are more likely to engage with traditional foods that emphasize natural ingredients and health benefits. The results also support the work of Dubois et al. (2005) and Shukla and Purani (2012), who suggested that the perception of luxury in food influences con-

sumer engagement, particularly for unique and culturally rich dining experiences.

Staff service was found to be a key driver of TFP engagement, which aligns with findings by Ryu et al. (2012) and Qin and Prybutok (2009), emphasizing that friendly and knowledgeable staff enhance customer experience and loyalty. Furthermore, the role of TFP engagement as a mediator in strengthening revisit intention and e-WOM corroborates the work of Zaichkowsky (1994) and Sheth et al. (1991), who described engagement as a mechanism that deepens consumer attachment and loyalty.

Interestingly, the non-significant effect of convenience orientation contradicts previous studies (Olsen et al., 2021; Pieniak et al., 2009), which suggested that ease of access influences consumer choices. This discrepancy may be due to the unique context of traditional food, where authenticity and cultural experience outweigh convenience factors.

Overall, this study confirms the importance of food quality, health consciousness, luxury perception, and staff service in driving engagement with traditional food. These insights provide practical implications for restaurant managers, emphasizing the need to enhance food quality, highlight health benefits, and provide excellent service to foster customer engagement and loyalty. Future research could explore additional factors such as social influences and digital engagement to further understand consumer behavior in traditional food settings.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how key restaurant attributes, namely food quality, staff service, health involvement, luxury involvement, and convenience orientation, influence customer engagement with traditional food products (TFP) and how such engagement, in turn, impacts revisit intention and positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in Acehese traditional restaurants.

The findings reveal that food quality, staff service, health consciousness, and the perception of luxury significantly drive customer engagement in TFP, while convenience orientation shows no significant influence. Engagement with traditional food acts as a powerful mediator that enhances customers' intention to revisit and recommend the restaurant online. These results indicate that authenticity, cultural richness, and personalized service are more influential than convenience in the traditional food-dining context.

Based on these insights, restaurant managers should prioritize improving food quality, emphasizing health benefits, providing high-quality service, and creating culturally immersive dining environments to foster emotional and behavioral customer engagement. Such efforts can lead to stronger customer loyalty and increased digital visibility through positive e-WOM.

Future research may explore the role of digital engagement and social media influence on traditional food loyalty, or examine comparative dynamics between traditional and modern dining preferences in various cultural settings. Additionally, longitudinal or experimental approaches could enrich understanding of how sustained engagement evolves over time.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Scale of measurements

No	Variable	Statement/questionnaire item	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)	Validity (AVE)	Source
1	Convenience Orientation	I prefer meals that require little preparation.	0.80	0.58	Candel (2001)
		Spending a lot of time cooking is a waste of time for me.	0.80	0.58	
		I often use convenience foods to save time.	0.80	0.58	
		I like to prepare meals that are easy and quick to make.	0.80	0.58	
2	Food Quality	The food served is fresh.	0.86	0.63	Ryu et al. (2012), Hanaysha (2016)
		The food tastes good.	0.86	0.63	
		The food presentation is attractive.	0.86	0.63	
		The food is served at the appropriate temperature.	0.86	0.63	
3	Involvement in Luxury	I find luxurious experiences important when dining out.	0.83	0.61	Dubois et al. (2005), Shukla and Purani (2012)
		I enjoy treating myself to luxurious meals.	0.83	0.61	
		Dining in a luxurious setting enhances my dining experience.	0.83	0.61	
		I am willing to pay more for a luxurious dining experience.	0.83	0.61	
4	Health Involvement	I often think about the healthiness of the food I eat.	0.81	0.60	Olsen (2003), Pieniak et al. (2009)
		Choosing healthy food is important to me.	0.81	0.60	
		I am willing to sacrifice taste for health benefits.	0.81	0.60	
		I pay attention to nutritional information when dining.	0.81	0.60	
5	Staff Service	The staff members are courteous and respectful.	0.87	0.66	Ryu et al. (2012), Qin and Prybutok (2009)
		The staff promptly respond to my requests.	0.87	0.66	
		The staff are knowledgeable about the menu.	0.87	0.66	
		The staff provide personalized service.	0.87	0.66	
6	Engagement in TFP	I feel emotionally connected to traditional food products.	0.82	0.59	Bell and Marshall (2003), Reynolds and Olson (2001)
		I enjoy sharing experiences related to traditional food with others.	0.82	0.59	
		I actively seek out traditional food when dining out.	0.82	0.59	
		I feel a sense of loyalty towards traditional food products.	0.82	0.59	
7	Intention to Revisit	I intend to revisit this traditional restaurant in the future.	0.85	0.65	Kim (2012)
		I will likely recommend this restaurant to friends and family.	0.85	0.65	
		I will consider this restaurant as my first choice when craving traditional food.	0.85	0.65	
8	Positive e-WOM	I am likely to share positive opinions about this restaurant online.	0.88	0.68	Wang et al. (2020), Adam et al. (2023)
		I would post favorable reviews about this restaurant on social media.	0.88	0.68	
		I would recommend this restaurant on online platforms.	0.88	0.68	

Notes: Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2017). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 demonstrate sufficient convergent validity.