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**RESTAURANT AUTHENTICITY AND  
PURCHASING INTENTIONS: THE  
MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL CONTAGION**

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*Master Thesis*

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Evidence indicates that "socially contaminated" items or products by celebrities or attractive people can trigger social contagion. However, the literature offers limited insights on whether the authenticity of the tourism and hospitality establishments (e.g., Hotels, restaurants) can also trigger social contagion.

This research aims to gain theoretical insights on the impact of authenticity of food in wanting to return to a certain restaurant. Based on a sample of 248 participants, this work reveals that the authenticity of the restaurant environment is a significant predictor of how customers feel about the authenticity of the food they are eating. In addition, food authenticity then impacts if customers want or not to come back to that restaurant. Ancient places were initially included in the model, but did not reach significance, although further studies should focus on understanding if authenticity in food is only relevant if we visit a place that is supposed to recreate the past.

The findings have key implications for the restaurant that aim to recreate a specific culture or specific place.

## KEYWORDS

Authenticity, social contagion, tourism, restaurants, food.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the key economic important aspects in economy (Forbes, 2021). In 2019 alone, the number of tourists was nearly 150 million (+4% comparing to the previous year). This generated 1487 USD billions, 3% more than in 2018. The region that leads the growth in arrivals is Middle East (8%) followed by Europe and Asia and the Pacific (both 4%) (UNWTO, 2020). 2020 was a year marked by a Covid-19, that impacted the tourism industry as presented by Forbes: "In the first 10 months of 2020 alone, it cost the tourism industry \$935 billion in revenue worldwide" (Forbes, 2021).

Due to the importance of tourism in nowadays economy, there is an academic interest in understanding customers and how and why they behave in a certain way. One of the fields academics study is the authenticity and its impacts in the customer behavior. Mostly authenticity has been investigated when related to several topics such as brand authenticity, brand essence (Newman & Dhar, 2014), brand loyalty, and brand love (Mody & Hanks, 2020). There are also studies regarding authenticity in restaurants (Levitt et al., 2020), ethnic cuisine (Yu et al., 2020), wineries (Beverland, 2006), or even laughter (Neves et al., 2018). Furthermore, there are also investigations regarding authenticity in social networks such as Twitter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). There is also some investigation concerning the impact of authenticity in tourism, including different topics: tourism experience (Brown, 2013; Ning, 2017; Petroman et al., 2010; Taylor, 2001; Technische Universität München, 2018), living like a local (Paulauskaite et al., 2017) destination (Fu, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Oliveira, 2019) or accommodation (Mody & Hanks, 2020). Studies are also suggesting that authenticity is important when the purpose of the trip is to revive the past, "tourism such as ethnic, history or culture tourism, which involve the representation of the Other or of the past" (Ning, 2017).

Previous studies investigated the impact of authenticity in brands and products and are clear that the origin of products interferes with the perception of quality by the consumer and also their preferences (Newman & Dhar, 2014). In this article is also stated that “products from the original factory” are perceived as “more authentic and valuable than identical products made elsewhere”. Additionally, prior research shows that authenticity can be perceived based on the belief that a certain product has the essence of the brand (Newman & Dhar, 2014). This is called contagion - contagion is the notion that objects may acquire a special aura or “essence” from their past (Newman & Dhar, 2014). On the other hand, we also have studies regarding authenticity in tourism, however, research involving this topic has mainly focused on the authenticity of the destination. For instance, (Technische Universität München, 2018) states that authenticity, in tourism, can be perceived through certain aspects, such as places that remain untouched by nowadays persons, or unique places that are specific from that land (the opposite of globalization). Travelers tend to look for unique experiences that give them a notion of the varied world we live in (Petroman et al., 2010). Previous research studied the impact of destination authenticity in the choice of where to travel (Fu, 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Oliveira, 2019) and also the possibility of living an authentic experience at the destination (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). It’s clear that authenticity impacts customer loyalty and also that the authenticity of a destination is a key success factor when we consider both the tourism industry and the tourist experience.

Nevertheless, prior research has failed to investigate if authenticity in tourism generates social contagion. The current research intention is to explain such a connection.

However, tourism has too many services where authenticity can have a positive or negative impact. It would be impossible to study them all in one piece.

Social Contagion has been mostly investigated when connected to brand essence and brand authenticity (Newman & Dhar, 2014), to package goods (Du & Kamakura, 2011), with persuasive

communication (Hasford et al., 2015), laughter (Neves et al., 2018) and smile (Woo & Chan, 2020) and with attractive persons (Argo et al., 2008). Despite this investigation, there are no or few academic studies that connect authenticity with social contagion. So, how does the authenticity of the experience impact social contagion?

The contributions of the research are: firstly, analysing the studies associated with authenticity of food, in order to address what is still unknown despite all the investigation around authenticity and social contagion in other areas. It is crucial to understand if authenticity of food has the same impact on social contagion as the authenticity of other services or brands has. Secondly, food services account for a large portion of the money spent on tourism and also an important sector for the economy so, by knowing the areas that are most important when customers consider returning to a restaurant, the industry could know how to prepare and what to address and define strategies based on those key factors, that consequently, could boost restaurants performance.

In practical terms, this research helps restaurant to understand what impacts customers perception on the authenticity of the restaurant and how authenticity of different factors impacts the loyalty or the waiting to come back to that place, ie, social contagion.

The composition of the thesis is as follows. In the next section the concepts of authenticity, tourist, food services and social contagion are presented. Then, the research model is theorised. Later, the methodology and results of this investigation are shown. Finally, the results of the analysis are discussed, including its implications and possible further research needed.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Food tourism is important when thinking about tourism as food consumption is one of the indispensable aspects of the tourism industry (Robinson & Getz, 2016). As food is a key attraction for tourists, many destinations try to present different and unique culinary experiences to tourists (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Tsai & Wang, 2017). As food is seen as a representation of national or regional identity, it can boost the image of a destination (Bessiere, 1998; Chang et al., 2010; Henderson, 2009). Hence, understanding the impact of local foods on the spent from tourist in food consumption is an important topic because it helps to understand tourists' views of a destination and to predict their future behaviors (Ali, F., Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Ryu, 2018). Especially because tourists are open to the experience of tasting and eating a variety of foods, and that impacts and inspires their travel plans (Chen & Huang, 2016). Food consumption is thought to positively influence travelers' destination experiences (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Wolf, 2006) and can encourage travel satisfaction (Robinson & Getz, 2016).

As (Mak et al., 2017) points out, some studies have found that tourists' preferences for regional food can play a crucial role in influencing destination choices (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Robinson & Getz, 2016). because food is seen to be a driver of tourists' memorable memories (Lashley, C., Morrison, A. J., Randall, S., & Sloan, 2003). "The different contributions of local food consumption, which are emotive, functional, epistemic, and social, inspire tourists to revisit or recommend destinations to others." (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020).

As per (Mitchell & Hall, 2003), it's critical to comprehend how travelers behave when it comes to eating in order to acquire efficient market conduct. However, little is known about the interactions between visitors' attitudes toward local food, the value they place on consuming it locally, the image of the food at their destination, and their behavioural intentions.

Food has been a focus in tourism research in recent years as said by “Since Belisle's (1983) exploration of food and tourism, the subject of food tourism, or the close relationship between food and tourism, has been a visible tourism research area for the past three decades, but its unprecedented growth and popularization in the tourism literature has witnessed in the more recent years (2008–2015).” (Ellis et al., 2018).

What is food tourism? Similar to art, music, architecture, film, literature, and other key elements of local culture, food is a fundamental part of culture. For the majority of people today, experiencing new and memorable beverages when travelling is thrilling, if not absolutely necessary. Food tourism is the search for and enjoyment of exceptional and memorable food and drink experiences, both locally and abroad. “If you rarely leave your neighborhood and travel across town to a new neighborhood to go to a special grocery store or to eat out, you are also a “food traveler.” The distance covered is not as important as the fact that food travelers are explorers and we’re always looking for our next unique experience.”(Wolf, n.d.)

“Eating is one of the main needs of a human.” (Avcikurt et al., 2016). As the food and beverage industry evolves, eating out has become a leisure activity (Yüncü, 2010) and individuals in the modern society spend less time cooking in order to keep up with their busy lives (Su, 2015). As a result of these, humans have started to eat out and this action has become a touristic activity (Yüncü, 2010). Today, gastronomy tourism has come to be an important part of tourism to appeal to international tourists (Horng & (Simon) Tsai, 2010) and many destinations are using food as a resource in their tourism marketing (Lin et al., 2011) to differentiate themselves and expand their market base (McKercher et al., 2008). Food tourism is now a crucial component of the growth of tourism destinations (Y. Kim et al., 2009).

A growing trend in travel is gastronomy tourism. With their exquisite cuisines, Italy, France, and Thailand have drawn a lot of travelers (Chi et al., 2013). One may say that cuisine plays a significant

part in today's competition with other travel destinations (Horng & (Simon) Tsai, 2010), especially as “the world is increasingly open; however, tourists seek experiences based on local identity and culture”(OMT, 2012).

Therefore, gastronomy should be regarded not only as a key cultural product but also as a beneficial component of these products such as monuments, museums, architecture and events (Correia, Moital, Costa & Peres, 2008) Accordingly to according (Sharples & Food, 2003) food tourism is an exploratory trip to a gastronomic region, for leisure purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers’ markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food. In addition, this experiential journey is related to a particular lifestyle that includes experimentation, learning from different cultures, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the qualities or attributes related to tourism products, as well as culinary specialities produced in that region through its consumption. Thus, the experience of gastronomic tourism is considered as such, provided that everything mentioned above constitutes the main reason or motivation to travel for visitors to a particular destination or at least one significant reason.

Additionally, as said by Tao Zhang, Junyu Chen and Baoliang Hu: “Tourists perceive restaurants as an important attribute of a tourist destination, one whose food quality, food service, and physical environment could show local traditions and culture and then shape the tourist gastronomy experience.” (Zhang et al., 2019).

According to (Chen & Huang, 2016) not many research has been done on how tourists feel about the local cuisine in a tourist area at various points in their journey. (Choe & Kim, 2018) argue that the tourist’s cultural background has to be taken into account when analysing the impact local food consumption by tourists' because their own food culture impacts their food perception. Food also substantially reflects some aspects of a place because it can be seen as an item that could reflect

the native customs (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013) and give travelers a glimpse of the destination's unique lifestyle (Robinson & Getz, 2016).

Enjoying foods and drinks is a major part of many people's leisure and travel activities as well as being an experience in itself. Customers are seeking greater originality and authenticity from their food, whatever authenticity entails. However, since our conceptions of authenticity are sometimes ambiguous and conflicting, this can lead to complications (Beer, 2008). Food is part of our day-to-day life but may also be made even more unique when it is consumed in a hospitality, leisure, or tourism context. Our sentiments toward food are varied, and this is increasingly influencing how we make decisions regarding food (Beer, 2008).

Despite its significance, limited work has investigated how local gastronomy is commercialised as a crucial aspect of regional tourism and also how local foods embedded in the destination's culture influence tourists' perception and behaviour at different levels (S. Kim & Iwashita, 2016). "Shiraz, as an Iranian metropolis, offers a stunning variety of culinary delights as regional foods such as fesenjan (pomegranate walnut stew), bademjan (eggplant and tomato stew), baghali polo (rice with dills and fava beans), zereshk polo (barberry rice), gormeh sabzi (vegetable stew), ash-e reshteh (noodle and bean soup), tahdig (crunchy fried rice), and kebab (lamb, chicken, lamb liver, ground meat)." (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). All of these traditional cuisines have the capacity to have an influence visitors' decisions and actions.

This study investigates the influence of the authenticity of food services on social contagion and the intention of comeback to that place.

## STUDY RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold. First, this master thesis will attempt to provide a literature review of articles related to food, tourism, authenticity, and social contagion.

Second, based on the review of these articles, a theory regarding *How Authenticity Of Food Services Trigger Social Contagion* will be proposed.

## HYPOTHESIS

After we understand what impacts customer perceptions of food authenticity, we will be able to understand if food authenticity impacts social contagion.

To study the connection between food authenticity and social contagion we have four hypotheses:

H1: authenticity in food generates social contagion

As previously explained, it is not clear the impact of food authenticity in social contagion. Previous research suggests that the authenticity of consumer products and brands impacts social contagion (Newman & Dhar, 2014). Furthermore, it's also proven that when people considered attractive touch something, that product becomes more desirable for us (Argo et al., 2008). However, is this true when we are talking about food, is social contagion impacted by authenticity or even by the attractiveness of the locals?

H2: authenticity in food is only relevant if we visit a place that is supposed to recreate the past

Previous research (Petroman et al., 2010; Taylor, 2001) shows that when we visit ancient places authenticity is key, as travelers expect to find a recreation of the past. However, is not clear if this

impacts social contagion. It is also not clear if authenticity is only important when we consider such places.

H3: authenticity has an impact on loyalty

Authenticity enriches brand history, quality, style, and method of production. Doing so it impacts on consumer loyalty (Beverland, 2006). Can we prove that food authenticity has the same impact on loyalty?

H4: social contagion mediates the relationship between authenticity and loyalty

The authenticity of products leads people to see those products as special, as they have. Because of it they tend to prefer products that are authentic (Newman & Dhar, 2014). Does the same happen in food services?

## CONCEPTUAL MODEL

To better understand food authenticity, the next step of literature review is structuring the concepts that impact the perception customer have on food authenticity, i.e., topics discussed regarding food authenticity and what impacts the vision that a customer has on the authenticity of the food he is eating or the food services he is visiting. Based on this it will be then possible to understand why food authenticity triggers social contagion.

As stated in the paper *Authenticity, Quality, and Loyalty: Local Food and Sustainable Tourism Experience* tourists use at least three types of attributes to evaluate the authenticity of their experience “Functional—food quality; humanic—service quality; and mechanical—the physical environment.” (Zhang et al., 2019). Furthermore, within these three pillars, “an authentic food experience is a kind of cultural phenomenon in which chefs, restaurants, recipes, and dishes are

considered in ways that allow visitors to integrate into the local culture and spirit” (Zhang et al., 2019).

Succinctly, these attributes could be grouped into two major groups: external and internal perceptions. Customers that value more the External qualities would be the ones that value the most the aesthetics, production technique or designs whilst the customers that value the internal perceptions would be the ones that are more careful with a personal connection, as they search to find affinity (Littrell et al., 1993).

Based on what is stated before, options for what can impact food authenticity have been detailed below.

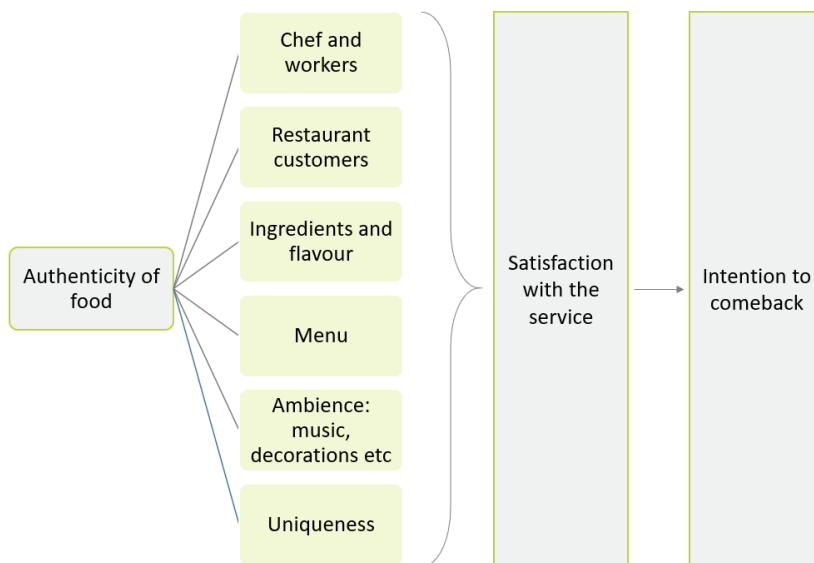


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

## 1. Chef and workers

Previous research shows that if the chef and the employees are in accordance to the ethnicity of the restaurant of customers perceive the restaurant as more authentic and embed more in the restaurant culture (Zhang et al., 2019).

Customers recognize food as more authentic if “they are served by a service provider whose appearance corresponds with the ethnic background of the restaurant.” (K. Kim & Baker, 2017).

## 2. Uniqueness

Uniqueness seems to be positively connected with different authenticity categories, one of them food (Littrell et al., 1993).

Additionally, “much of the appeal of local food lies in the fact that it is special and unique. Thus, the best way to experience food authenticity is to be there” (Zhang et al., 2019).

## 3. Restaurant customers

Research shows that customers, when searching for authentic experiences, tend to search for places with locals (Littrell et al., 1993).

However, this only has impact if you are a mainstream customer. If you are an ethnic customer, so if you are Italian going to an Italian restaurant, you will be focused on other ways of analyzing authenticity (Wang & Mattila, 2015).

## 4. Ingredients and flavors

According to Littrell, Anderson, and Brown (1993), customers judge if the food is authentic or not based on the materials used and the ethnic origins of the producer.

## 5. Menu

The menu is one of the first impression customers have once they arrive to the restaurant, only after the ambience and the employees.

The menu provides evidence of the authenticity of the place through the language and descriptions. If the menu is written in a the original language evidence shows that customers feel that their food is more authentic (K. Kim & Baker, 2017).

## 6. Ambience: music, decorations etc

Lastly, the physical environment also plays a role in spreading the authenticity message to customers as it integrates the food consumption experience (Zhang et al., 2019).

According to Wang and Mattila (2015), when the ambience is in accordance to the service team, so when both share the same ethnicity, the perceived authenticity is higher.

“The results suggest the importance of ethnic congruency among the ethnicity of the service offering, the physical environment, and the service providers” (Wang & Mattila, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Method

Questionnaires were randomly distributed through online panel Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform targeting people who ate at a restaurant in the past two years.

A total of 361 questionnaires were collected, but due to incomplete answers only 248 responses (68.7%) were considered valid. The sample was 65% male vs. 35% female. The age of respondents ranged from 23 to over 69 with an average of 38 years old. 98% were American citizens.

To test and assess the causal relationships between the variables, the Bootstrapping method was used. This method allows to test the statistical significance of variables.

The “bootstrapping [method] is a non-parametric resampling procedure that assesses the variability of a statistic by examining the variability of the sample data rather than using parametric assumptions to assess the precision of the estimates (...)” (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016).

The bootstrap method provides several path coefficients that estimate the relationships in the structural model (i.e., between the constructs in the model).

For the purpose of this study, I will focus on P value. The P value “in the context of structural model assessment, it is the probability of error for assuming that a path coefficient is significantly different from zero. In applications, researchers compare the p value of a coefficient with a significance level selected prior to the analysis to decide whether the path coefficient is statistically significant” (Smart PLS, n.d.). The lower the p-value, the greater the statistical significance of the variables.

The following steps encompass analysis of reliability and validity of the measurement model.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 1. Variables details

Before looking at the results, let's understand the variables in detail.

The environment evaluates how customers felt about the restaurant surroundings, so the exterior and interior design, the background music the scent the colors and lighting and the layout of the restaurant.

The restaurant appearance evaluates what customers think about the authenticity of the environment, so if they perceived the exterior appearance and the interior design of the restaurant as authentically. It also evaluates if the traditional or contemporary music at the restaurant was authentic.

Authenticity evaluates the customer perspectives of the restaurant, if it offers only a limited menu, if the menu written in the original language of the restaurant, if it offers local dishes and specialty dishes, wines and beers.

Local cuisine evaluates how customers feel overall about the restaurant, considering all the criteria above.

Emotions include how customers felt about the restaurant, all positive emotions as joyful, excited, peacefulness, refreshed or relaxed.

Word of mouth tell us if they would recommend the restaurant to someone else.

Visit again evaluates how likely customers are of visit that restaurant again and to share positive things about that place.

Social media looks at how social media impacted the experience, for example if viewing posts about this restaurant experience stimulates interest to learn more about it.

## 2. Results

To evaluate the quality of the structural model two steps were used, both methods with 5000 subsamples. First, bootstrap method was calculated and then, PLS- algorithm, to understand and validate the significance of the variables being investigated.

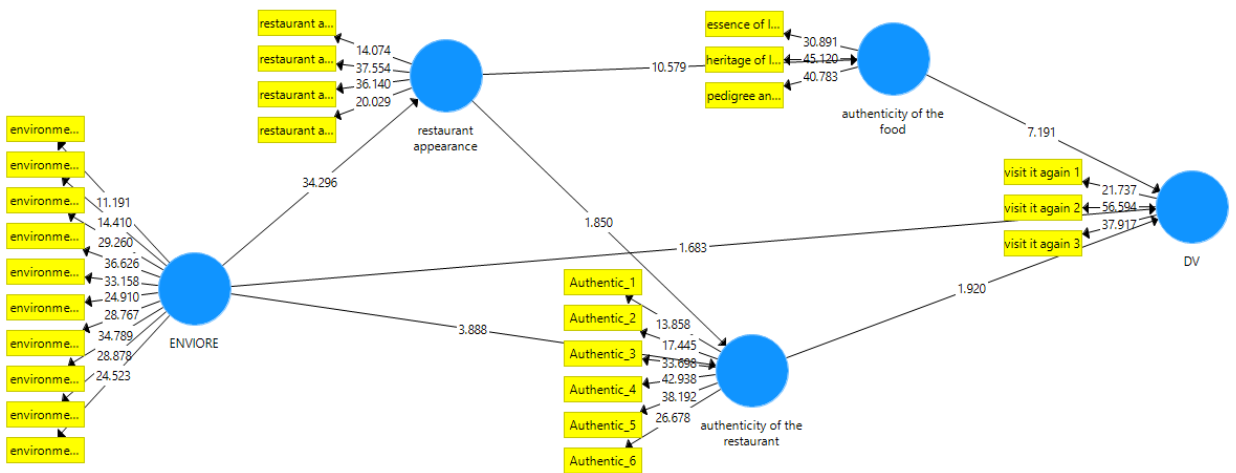
When analyzing the outcomes of the bootstrapping, all the path coefficients were considered significant. We can see that the environment is strongly connected with the restaurant appearance that then influences the perceived authenticity of food. The authenticity of food then impacts the want to come back (DV), supporting hypothesis 4.

We can see that the authenticity of food has a bigger connection with wanting to come back than the authenticity of the environment, proving that the environment has an indirect impact on wanting to come back through the restaurant appearance and authenticity of food rather than a direct and immediate impact. This supports hypothesis 1 and also hypothesis 3.

We can also see that the environment has some impact in the authenticity of the restaurant but not as much as restaurant appearance.

Unfortunately, the data was not enough to support hypothesis 2.

Below we can see the results obtained through the bootstrap analysis on the variables described before.



	DV	ENVIORE	authenticity of the food	authenticity of the restaurant	restaurant appearance
DV					
ENVIORE	0.588		0.640	0.701	0.857
authenticity of the food	0.729				
authenticity of the restaurant	-0.219				
restaurant appearance	0.488		0.747	0.255	

## DISCUSSION

Interestingly, the results add to prior studies on the impact of authenticity on services. The study proves that the relevance that authenticity has in food is similar to the relevance that authenticity has in other services (Newman & Dhar, 2014).

This study provides strong evidence the perceived food authenticity impacts the will of come back to that restaurant. Additionally, the study proves that the environment and the restaurant appearance have a positive impact on the way customers perceive the food authenticity. The results contribute to prior studies on the impact of authenticity of products on social contagion (Newman & Dhar, 2014) (Beverland, 2006).

Thus, it was found that the physical environment plays a role in spreading the authenticity message to customers as it integrates the food consumption experience as supported by Zhang (Zhang et al., 2019). According to Wang and Mattila (2015), when the ambience is in accordance to the service team, so when both share the same ethnicity, the perceived authenticity is higher. But the environment and the appearance of the restaurant have to be in accordance with the food as both impact the authenticity of food and not the perceived authenticity of the restaurant itself. The authenticity of food is more important and is a good indicator on whether customers would want to come back or not.

According to the results, it can be concluded that H1 and H3 are statistically significant. Authenticity of food highly correlated with customers wanting to come back ( $p=0.729$ ).

Authenticity of the restaurant is negatively correlated with customers wanting to come back ( $p=0.219$ ) as this concept is defined by many other factors, such as ambience and authenticity of food that have a positive impact on consumers. Therefore, it can be concluded that each component has its independent value rather than being part of a wider concept (authenticity of the restaurant).

Therefore, it is important that restaurants provide authenticity is all independent factors (food, music, menu, etc).

The research model supports the evidence that authenticity of food has impact an impact on social contagion. Authenticity of food strengthens the relationship between ambiance or restaurant environment and social contagion, evidencing the presence of authenticity of food as the main factor that impacts social contagion but that can be influenced by other variables.

## 1. Theoretical implications

While prior research has assessed the challenges and consequences of authenticity of brands only a few have studied authenticity of food services and the impact on wanting to come back to that restaurant. The study highlights the importance of food authenticity in wanting to come back and the impact of environment and restaurant appearance on the perception of food authenticity.

The findings reinforce the importance of authenticity is any service, meaning that the relationship between authenticity and wanting to buy again is always crucial, for any service.

As explained earlier, consumers use at least three types of attributes to evaluate the authenticity of their experience “Functional—food quality; humanic—service quality; and mechanical—the physical environment.” (Zhang et al., 2019). Furthermore, within these three pillars, “an authentic food experience is a kind of cultural phenomenon in which chefs, restaurants, recipes, and dishes are considered in ways that allow visitors to integrate into the local culture and spirit” (Zhang et al., 2019).

Succinctly, these attributes could be grouped into two major groups: external and internal perceptions. External qualities refer to aesthetics, production technique or designs whilst internal perceptions refer to food (Littrell et al., 1993). Thus this study proves that external perceptions

impact internal perceptions and then, internal perceptions impact the desire to come back to that place.

The conclusions reinforce the importance of authenticity of food in social contagion, meaning that the relationship between ambiance or restaurant environment and social contagion, became more significant through food authenticity. Food authenticity, however, is what impacts directly the social contagion of a restaurant.

The impact that the environment has on food authenticity was the most important construct in the model, since it was significant in predicting how customers feel about food authenticity. So, though the environment and the restaurant authenticity don't impact directly social contagion they have a strong connection to how customers perceive the authenticity of food.

The importance of authenticity when visiting ancient places was removed from the model as there was not enough data to support if travelers expect to find a recreation of the past when visiting ancient places and if this impacts social contagion.

## 2. Practical implications

The thesis implies a need to analyse further how environment impacts the perception of food and what characteristics of the environment and restaurant appearance impact the perceived authenticity of food.

The implications, to the restaurants and food services, is that restaurants should align their appearance to the type of food they serve.

The model implies that environment and restaurant appearance are important variables, when they affect the perception customers have of authenticity of food and therefore the will to come back. Restaurants should create processes to understand which elements of their appearance impact

customers, either through positive or negative impact and focusing on solving the elements that create a negative impact.

### 3. Limitations

The data for this study was collected in one questionnaire and respondents were mainly from the USA. To further analyze, it is important to continuously evaluate perceived authenticity and its relation to wanting to come back. For more accurate results, it could be necessary to do face-to-face interviews to understand customers perceptions.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights the impact of external perception of a restaurant, such as environment and appearance, in the perception consumer have of the food served in that restaurant. The study also covers the impact of internal perception on the desire of coming back to that restaurant. All of this, based on a specific theoretical and empirical model, that underline the importance of food and restaurant environment.

Restaurant environment is considered to have a positive impact on the perception customers have of food. Food plays an important role in wanting to come back to that restaurant, but restaurant appearance was not considered an important variable to explain wanting to come back, meaning that the how the restaurant looks wont impact if the customers want to come back or not but will impact th perception that the customers have about the food that is tasting.

Restaurants should consider that how the restaurant looks will impact what customers feel when tasting the food. And that food is what has more impact on customers wanting to come back to the restaurant or not.

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