

Understanding How Local Food Experiences and Cultural Competence Influence Culinary Tourist Behavior

Sesilya Kempa, Felix Hartono, Devi Destiani Andilas*

Petra Christian University, Jalan Siwalankerto 121-131 Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author; E-mail: devi.destiani@petra.ac.id

Abstract

Traditional cuisine is a cultural element with significant potential for driving tourism development, making understanding the psychological mechanisms that influence tourist intentions crucial. Four dimensions of experience—novel, authentic, sensory, and social experience—were examined to determine how each contributed to the formation of behavioral intentions through cultural competence. Data were collected from 101 domestic tourists who had visited Surakarta as a sample and analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0. The results showed that sensory and social experiences significantly influenced behavioral intention through increased cultural competence. Conversely, novel and authentic experiences did not show a significant mediating effect. These findings emphasize the importance of optimizing sensory and social aspects in designing Surakarta culinary tourism experiences and offer managerial implications for developing culture-based destination strategies.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism, Local Food, Culinary Experience, Cultural Competency, Tourist Behavioral Intention.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries with many different traditional dishes. Detikfood says Indonesia has 3,259 traditional foods across 34 provinces. This number is constantly growing because many local dishes remain unknown (Lestari, 2019). The various traditional foods in Indonesia are an essential part of the culture that needs to be protected. To protect this heritage, we need to raise tourists' awareness by teaching them about the cultural values in traditional meals. Mohamed et al. (2020) propose that highlighting the uniqueness and appeal of local cuisine defines a successful approach to promoting a destination as a tourist destination. Kim and Eves (2012) also agree that food and beverage consumption significantly influences the competitive marketing and promotion of destinations.

Surakarta is a city shaped by the blending of Javanese, Arab, Dutch, and Chinese cultures (Rohman, 2021). It has a unique culinary scene with dishes that are visually appealing, tasty, and aromatic, making it a great place for tourists to visit (Kaushal & Yadav, 2021; Kemenparekraf, 2020). In 2022, there will be 928,447 tourists and 1,148 restaurants in Surakarta (SoloData, 2024). Amira (2022) and Mentari (2021) said that *selat solo*, *sate buntel*, *nasi liwet*, *serabi*, and *sate kere* are the most famous foods in Surakarta. Pasar Gede is also an essential place for food and cultural interaction, thanks to continuous government programs to improve and promote it (Mbah SEO, 2024).

Successful promotion often drives tourist behavior, such as returning, recommending, leaving positive reviews, or buying again. These are all important for people to keep coming back and make the place more

interesting (Kim & Eves, 2012; Liu et al., 2018). However, these intentions are not formed solely through food consumption; they are also developed through learning cultural values, a process called cultural competence. Trying different cuisines improves people's cultural awareness. Lin et al. (2023) say that food helps people appreciate other cultures and encourages us to be more social. As a result, cultural competence is not only crucial for shaping how tourists act, but also necessary for protecting culinary traditions from fading as culture changes.

However, despite the rapid growth of Surakarta's culinary industry, this sector faces several significant challenges that have not been widely addressed in research. Local culinary entrepreneurs often adopt marketing strategies that emphasize commercial aspects and visual appeal over cultural values, eroding the cultural identity of food. Furthermore, domestic tourists tend to be consumer-oriented, simply "trying" the dishes without understanding the cultural heritage behind them. This condition results in low cultural competence among tourists. It does not produce long-term impacts in the form of sustainable behavior such as repeat visits, recommendations, or culinary cultural preservation. This phenomenon is exacerbated by intense competition among culinary destinations, further marginalizing cultural values.

In tourism, food is a key motivator for visits (Dimitrovski & Crespi-Vallbona, 2017; Liu et al., 2018). Lin et al. (2023) evaluated local food consumption experiences across four dimensions: novel experience, authentic experience, sensory experience, and social experience, which aligns with self-determination theory,

suggesting that enriched experiences can enhance cultural competence (Kim et al., 2020). The culinary diversity of Surakarta reflects these four experiential characteristics; however, no research in Indonesia has examined how these culinary experiences contribute to the formation of cultural competence and tourist behavior.

Previous research has shown that food experiences can influence satisfaction, revisit intention, and broaden tourists' cultural interpretations (Fan et al., 2022; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mohamed et al., 2020). However, the role of cultural competence as a mediating mechanism explaining how culinary experiences influence behavioral intentions has not been comprehensively studied, particularly in the context of Indonesian culinary tourism. Lin et al. (2023) emphasized that cultural competence grows when tourists engage with local cuisine, as culinary experiences can broaden perspectives, build appreciation for cultural diversity, and increase willingness to interact socially. Thus, cultural competence not only drives tourist behavior but is also a crucial element in protecting culinary traditions from fading amid cultural change.

This study aims to examine the impact of innovative, authentic, sensory, and social experiences on cultural competence and to evaluate the influence of cultural competence on culinary tourists' behavioral intentions in Surakarta. This study also examines how cultural competence serves as a mediator between these four experience dimensions and behavioral intention. This gives us a better understanding of how experience- and culture-based mechanisms shape tourists' behavior.

This investigation is anticipated to yield dual contributions. Theoretically, it aims to enhance academic literature by introducing a relational model among variables that has seldom been utilized in Indonesia's culinary tourism setting, thereby providing a reference for future research. In practice, the results should help local governments and food business owners develop plans to protect and promote traditional foods. By utilizing the qualities inherent in tourists' innovative, authentic, sensory, and social experiences, stakeholders can augment the appeal and sustainability of local culinary tourism.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2020), explains that humans have a natural habit to thrive when their basic psychological needs are met. SDT focuses on three primary needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – which form the basis for motivation and behavior. When an environment or experience fulfills a person's need for competence,

motivational processes intensify, resulting in more internalized behavior.

In the context of this research, SDT is relevant because novel, authentic, sensory, and social culinary experiences can enrich tourists' understanding and fulfill their need for competence, thereby increasing cultural competence. Fulfilling this competence encourages behavioral intentions, such as the desire to return to or recommend local cuisine. Thus, SDT provides a theoretical framework for understanding how culinary experiences can shape cultural competence and ultimately influence tourist behavior.

2.2. Behavioral Intention

Liu et al. (2018) define behavioral intention as the probability that a person will engage in certain behaviors, such as promoting something by word of mouth, returning to a restaurant, or telling others about it. Kim et al. (2020) also describe it as the extent to which a person believes they're willing to do something. Wakefield and Blodgett (in Jang & Ha, 2015) argue that a good service environment can make people happy and excited, thereby increasing their likelihood of buying again and recommending the business. In general, behavioral intention indicates how motivated someone is by their experiences in a given situation. The leading indicators are a desire to return and to spread positive reviews (Kim et al., 2020).

2.3. Novel Experience

According to Stone et al. (2018), novelty occurs when travelers experience new places that make them feel as if they are discovering something for the first time. So, culinary tourists are those who travel to other places to try the local food (Gradianto, 2022). Ji et al. (2016) stated that novel experience as the feeling of novelty and unfamiliarity within various cultures or lifestyles, satisfying the desire for new experiences and encouraging tourists to try foods that taste different from their usual tastes. Lee and Crompton (in Ji et al., 2016) claimed that this motivation arises from encountering unfamiliar cultural, lifestyle, or geographical factors. Lin et al. (2023) apply this concept to local food consumption, defining novel experience as the extent to which distinctive and original culinary encounters enrich eating experiences, as manifested in behaviors such as seeking new options, sampling unfamiliar foods, and exploring different cultures.

2.4. Authentic Experience

In the context of culinary tourism, an authentic experience is defined as a genuine interaction that respects

and preserves traditions and culture from the past (Liu et al., 2018). Clients get a one-of-a-kind experience that goes beyond their daily routine when they eat real food. Being authentic helps a restaurant stand out. It attracts tourists who want to try original dishes rooted in cultural and traditional values passed down through generations. Jang and Ha (2015) say that conventional restaurants are authentic if they prepare food with ingredients and recipes used only by one ethnic or cultural group. This is often clear from the restaurant's decor, music, and design. Lin et al. (2023) explain that real experiences in culinary tourism involve finding authentic local food that captures the essence of local culture. Liu et al. (2018) say that for an experience to be truly authentic, the restaurant, the food, and the service must all be genuine.

2.5. Sensory Experience

Mohamed et al. (2020) define sensory experience as a physical phenomenon that engages the human senses of sight, taste, hearing, smell, and touch during the act of ingesting food. Lin et al. (2023) emphasize that sensory experience related to consuming local food primarily involves touch, smell, and taste. Pollard et al. (in Kim & Eves, 2012) underscore that sensory perception is crucial for the psychological and physiological dimensions of food appreciation. Urry (in Kim & Eves, 2012) contends that sensory experience significantly affects individuals' assessments of food and beverage preferences, with taste often serving as the primary determinant. The sensory experience of food is crucial for eliciting memories and shaping perceptions, leading to either positive or negative assessments of the dish. The way the food looks, smells, and tastes all tell you how it feels to eat it (Lin et al., 2023).

2.6. Social Experience

Kim and Eves (2012) say that social experience is the desire to connect with and have fun with friends, family, and others. This creates meaningful shared experiences. Stone et al. (2018) highlight that social connections are essential for creating unforgettable memories, as individuals often remember events with friends with whom they experienced them. When you eat local food, having traditional dinners with friends makes the experience more memorable. Kim and Eves (2012) also say that spending time with people you already know or meeting new ones helps you make friends, strengthen family ties, and meet your need for social interaction. Lin et al. (2023) assert that social experiences influence tourists' perceptions and behaviors; for example, when tourists interact with restaurant staff, it can be a social learning process that enhances their understanding of local culture. Kim and Eves (2012) say that social

experiences include meeting new people, hanging out with friends, and building stronger friendships.

2.7. Cultural Competence

Cheung et al. (2002) assert that cultural influences mold numerous facets of an individual's existence, encompassing beliefs, values, perceptions, lifestyle, attitudes, and emotions. Dillard et al. (in Cheung et al., 2002) define cultural competence as the sensitivity, awareness, and comprehension of cultural significance, where understanding indicates sufficient knowledge and sensitivity indicates openness and responsiveness. Salmeski (in Tsaur & Tu, 2019) describes it as the ability to understand various cultures quickly, translate that understanding into action, and interact proficiently with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Lin et al. (2023) conceptualize cultural competence as a developmental process in which individuals recognize, accept, and assimilate cultural differences through cultural intelligence, thereby augmenting their capacity to modify behavior within societal contexts. Fan et al. (2022) point out that successful cross-cultural interaction depends on understanding and using cultural knowledge. In general, cultural competency is the capacity, awareness, and sensitivity to learn about and adapt to cultural differences appropriately. Indicators include knowledge of local food culture and practices, adherence to consumption norms and ethics, respect for local culinary traditions, and appreciation for interactions with diverse culinary cultures (Tsaur & Tu, 2019).

2.8. Relationships Between Concepts and Research Hypotheses

Previous research indicates that novel, authentic, sensory, and social experiences significantly affect cultural competency, which, in turn, influences behavioral intention. Lin et al. (2023) found that new experiences make people more culturally competent by allowing them to engage with local traditions, customs, and practices. Conversely, Mohamed et al. (2020) pointed out that enjoying local cuisine while abroad provides an improved experience that enhances cultural understanding. Likewise, Kim and Eves (2012) and Liu et al. (2018) contended that genuine experiences, including interaction with local history, food authenticity, and cultural settings, cultivate enhanced cultural knowledge and appreciation. Furthermore, sensory experiences, characterized by direct involvement of human senses, have been demonstrated to facilitate cultural learning and behavioral adaptation (Kim & Eves, 2012; Lin et al., 2023). Social experiences are also very important since interacting with people from different cultures helps people appreciate cultural diversity, even when

there are differences (Kim et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2016).

Moreover, numerous studies have shown that cultural competence positively influences behavioral intention, affecting an individual's readiness to engage in particular actions, such as revisiting, recommending, or disseminating favorable experiences (Ahn et al., 2019; Fan et al., 2022; Tsaur & Tu, 2019). Cultural competency empowers individuals to analyze cultural information and make well-informed behavioral choices efficiently. It also serves as a mediating factor connecting experiencing dimensions to behavioral intention. Ahn (2020) and Lin et al. (2023) propose that competence experience influences how people turn learning into action. Consequently, this study posits nine hypotheses: H₁–H₄ examine the impact of the four experiential dimensions on cultural competence; H₅ explores the effect of cultural competence on behavioral intention; and H₆–H₉ assess the mediating role of cultural competence in the relationship between each experiential dimension and behavioral intention.

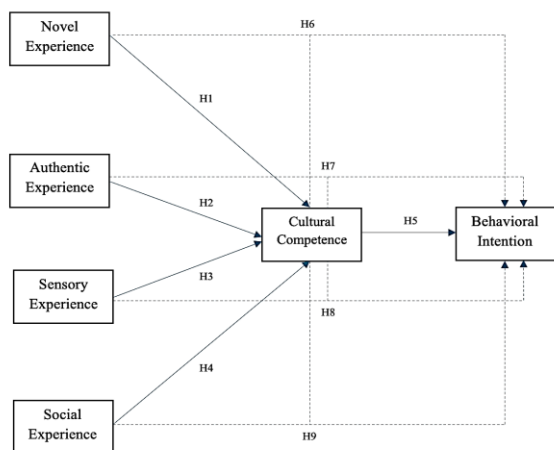


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. Methods

This study utilizes a quantitative research design including a descriptive survey format. Rachman et al. (2024) assert that quantitative research aims to transform complex phenomena into numerical data for analytical purposes. The total population in this study is unknown, so the small sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula and a purposive sampling technique. The sampling criteria required respondents to be Indonesian citizens (WNI), non-residents of Surakarta City, have visited Surakarta within the previous six months with travel companions, have participated in culinary tourism and consumed local specialty foods in Surakarta, and be at least 18 years of age (legally recognized as adults capable of responsibility). From November 20 to December 1, 2024, a Google Form questionnaire was distributed via Line, WhatsApp, and QR

codes. This led to 144 people who met the sampling criteria responding.

The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire developed with variable indicators, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The variables included Novel Experience (NE) (Ji et al., 2016), Authentic Experience (AE) (Liu et al., 2018), Sensory Experience (SE) (Lin et al., 2023), Social Experience (SoE) (Kim et al., 2020), Cultural Competence (CC) (Tsaur & Tu, 2019), and Behavioral Intention (BI) (Kim et al., 2020). Indicators previously shown to be reliable in earlier research were used to measure each variable.

The Partial Least Squares (PLS) method was used to analyze the data. This is a variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method designed to simplify predictive analysis by following two main steps: the outer model evaluation and the inner model evaluation. The outer model evaluation confirms that each indicator is accurate and dependable. The inner model evaluation examines how the different parts of the research model fit together. For reflective indicators of latent variables, convergent validity was established when factor loadings were 0.5 or higher (for constructs with 3 to 7 indicators). Discriminant validity was evaluated using cross-loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5. The test was found to be reliable when both Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha exceeded 0.7 (Abdullah, 2015). We used R-square and predictive relevance (Q^2) values to evaluate the inner model. R-square values are split into four groups: very strong (>0.75), moderate (0.41–0.75), weak (0.25–0.40), and very weak (<0.25). A Q^2 value beyond 0 signifies robust predictive relevance, whereas $Q^2 < 0$ shows limited ability to predict (Ghozali, 2008).

Abdullah (2015) states that hypothesis testing is utilized to assess the validity of a suggested hypothesis. A hypothesis is a provisional assumption awaiting further validation. This study employs a t-test with the bootstrapping approach in SmartPLS to evaluate the hypotheses. The bootstrapping method is used to find the value of the t-statistic. This study's hypothesis testing has a 95% confidence level and a one-tailed t-table value of 1.645.

4. Result

4.2. Descriptive Analysis

Of the 144 people who answered the survey, 43 were excluded because they didn't meet the age, residency, or recent experience requirements for visiting Surakarta and trying its traditional foods. After removing two invalid datasets, 101 valid responses were used

for the analysis. The sample had almost equal numbers of men and women: 52 men (51.5%) and 49 women (48.5%). This shows that the representation was balanced.

Most respondents (70.3%) were aged 18–25, categorized as Generation Z, followed by 10.9% Millennials (aged 26–40) and 18.8% Generation X (aged over 40). Crosstab analysis showed that Generation Z respondents were evenly distributed across both genders, confirming that the study sample was primarily composed of young adults.

Table 1. Crosstab analysis of age range and gender

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
18-25 years (Gen Z)	40	32	72
26-30 years (Millennial)	3	2	5
31-35 years (Millennial)		2	2
36-40 years (Millennial)	3		3
Over 40 years (Gen X)	6	13	19
Total	52	49	101

The majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree (50.5%) or completed senior high school (45.5%), with only 3.9% holding a diploma and minimal postgraduate education. Based on respondents' origin, the majority were from East Java (38.6%), followed by Central Java, West Java, DKI Jakarta, and Yogyakarta (9.9%–18.8%), while a few of the others are from Banten, East Kalimantan, Bali, and West Nusa Tenggara, primarily because the distance from Surakarta is pretty far.

Questionnaire data showed that out-of-town tourists most frequently consumed Serabi Solo (75.7%) and Nasi Liwet (71.8%). Other popular dishes, including Timlo Solo, Selat Solo, Sate Buntel, Sosis Solo, Tengkleng, and Tongseng, were enjoyed by over 25% of respondents, showing high popularity. In contrast, dishes such as Sate Kere, Brambang Asem, Bubur Lemu, Tahu Acar, Lenjongan, Balung Kethek, and Tahok were consumed by fewer than 25%, indicating less familiarity. Meanwhile, 7.7% of respondents mentioned other dishes such as Semar Mendem and Nasi Langgi, highlighting the wide range of food preferences among tourists.

4.3. Evaluation

The results of the outer model testing indicate that all constructs meet the criteria for convergent validity and reliability (Abdullah, 2015). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above

the threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct adequately explained the variance of its indicators. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs were recorded above 0.70, indicating that each construct has strong internal consistency and reliability. Thus, all constructs in this study have met the requirements for validity and reliability and can be used in subsequent structural model analysis (Table 3).

Table 2. Outer loading value

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Description
Novel Experience	NE1	0,771	Valid
	NE2	0,763	Valid
	NE3	0,844	Valid
Authentic Experience	AE1	0,655	Valid
	AE2	0,683	Valid
	AE3	0,778	Valid
	AE4	0,820	Valid
	AE5	0,825	Valid
	AE6	0,766	Valid
	AE7	0,813	Valid
	AE8	0,704	Valid
	AE9	0,616	Valid
Sensory Experience	SE1	0,786	Valid
	SE2	0,886	Valid
	SE3	0,855	Valid
Social Experience	SoE1	0,713	Valid
	SoE2	0,818	Valid
	SoE3	0,843	Valid
	SoE4	0,867	Valid
Cultural Competence	CC1	0,850	Valid
	CC2	0,820	Valid
	CC3	0,788	Valid
	CC4	0,763	Valid
	CC5	0,797	Valid
Behavioral Intention	BI1	0,841	Valid
	BI2	0,819	Valid
	BI3	0,821	Valid
	BI4	0,824	Valid
	BI5	0,820	Valid

Note: NE: Novel Experience, AE: Authentic Experience, SE: Sensory Experience, SoE: Social Experience, CC: Cultural Competence, BI: Behavioral Intention

Discriminant validity was assessed by examining the cross-loadings of each indicator. The results of the cross-loading analysis indicate that all indicators load most strongly on their respective constructs. Indicators AE1–AE9 have loadings on the AE construct between 0.616 and 0.825, while indicators BI1–BI5 show loadings of 0.819–0.841 on the BI construct. In the Cultural Competence (CC) construct, indicators CC1–CC5 have the highest loadings, ranging from 0.763 to 0.850. Similarly, indicators NE1–NE3 have loadings of 0.763–0.844 on the NE construct, indicators SE1–SE3 have

loadings of 0.786–0.886 on the SE construct, and indicators SoE1–SoE4 show the highest loadings of 0.713–0.867 on the SoE construct. Overall, all indicators are shown to be more strongly associated with their respective constructs, thereby fulfilling the discriminant validity criterion based on cross-loadings.

Table 3. Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach’s Alpha (CA), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	CA	rho_a	rho_c	AVE
Authentic Experience	0,901	0,917	0,917	0,553
Behavioral Intention	0,884	0,914	0,914	0,681
Cultural Competence	0,864	0,901	0,901	0,647
Novel Experience	0,706	0,836	0,836	0,630
Sensory Experience	0,796	0,881	0,881	0,712
Social Experience	0,827	0,886	0,886	0,661

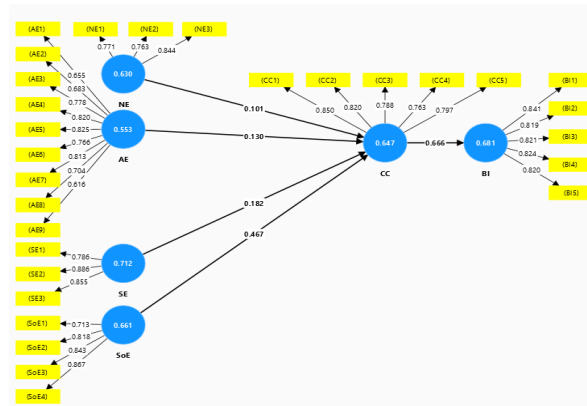


Figure 3. Outer model using SmartPLS 4.0

The results of the coefficient of determination test indicate that the independent variables explain the dependent variable at a moderate level. The R² value for Behavioral Intention is 0.444, indicating that 44.4% of the variation in behavioral intensity is described by the variables that influence it. Meanwhile, the culinary experience dimension has an R² of 0.569, accounting for 56.9% of the variance in cultural competence. Both value ranges fall within the moderate explanatory power range, so the model can be said to have adequate explanatory power. Besides, the Q² value of 0.457 indicates that the model demonstrates good predictive relevance.

The results showed that Novel Experience and Authentic Experience did not have a significant effect on Cultural Competence (H1 and H2 were rejected). In contrast, Sensory Experience ($\beta=0.182$; $p<0.05$) and Social Experience ($\beta=0.467$; $p<0.001$) were found to have a positive, significant effect on Cultural Competence. In addition, Cultural Competence had a positive

and significant impact on Behavioral Intention ($\beta = 0.666$; $p < 0.001$). Cultural Competence does not mediate the relationship between Novel Experience or Authentic Experience with Behavioral Intention (H6 and H7 were rejected). However, Cultural Competence was found to significantly mediate the relationships between Sensory Experience ($\beta=0.121$; $p<0.05$) and Social Experience ($\beta=0.311$; $p<0.001$) and Behavioral Intention.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results

Variable	Path Coefficient	T-statistics	P-value	Description
NE → CC	0.101	0.958	0.169	H ₁ rejected
AE → CC	0.130	1.106	0.134	H ₂ rejected
SE → CC	0.182	1.829	0.034	H ₃ accepted
SoE → CC	0.467	4.996	0.000	H ₄ accepted
CC → BI	0.666	9.998	0.000	H ₅ accepted
NE → CC → BI	0.067	0.951	0.171	H ₆ rejected
AE → CC → BI	0.087	1.086	0.139	H ₇ rejected
SE → CC → BI	0.121	1.735	0.041	H ₈ accepted
SoE → CC → BI	0.311	4.240	0.000	H ₉ accepted

5. Discussion

In this study, it was found that novel and authentic experiences did not have a significant effect on cultural competence, whereas sensory and social experiences did. Furthermore, cultural competence had a significant positive impact on behavioral intention, and its mediating role was significant only for the relationships between social experience, sensory experience, and behavioral intention.

Based on Table 4, the findings indicate that novel experiences do not significantly affect cultural competence ($p = 0.169$; $T = 0.958$), suggesting that tourists in Surakarta did not achieve significant growth in cultural understanding through these experiences. This finding differs from that of Lin et al. (2023), which found that novel experiences are linked to cultural competence because they help people better understand other cultures by engaging with local customs and traditions. The difference may be because most of the people who answered live in Java and have similar cultural backgrounds, which makes Surakarta’s experiences less unique. Kaushal and Yadav (2021) claim that unique experiences are essential for getting noticed, while Kim et al. (2020) highlight the significant impact of cross-cultural differences in helping people learn about food and culture.

Similarly, the effect of authentic experience on cultural competence was not significant ($p = 0.134$; $T = 1.106$). In contrast, Liu et al. (2018) found that food authenticity and environmental authenticity enhance an individual's familiarity and cultural understanding. In our study, although the mean score for authentic experience was relatively high (4.13), the authenticity respondents perceived was not sufficiently novel to stimulate more profound cultural curiosity. Because most respondents originated from Java, their cultural distance from Surakarta may have been too small for authentic experiences to register as significantly different. It is possible that some participants had previously sampled Surakarta cuisine in their home cities, which might have reduced the sense of encountering something genuinely new.

In contrast, sensory experience showed a positive and significant influence on cultural competence ($p = 0.034$; $T = 1.735$). This suggests that sensory triggers, such as taste, smell, and visual presentation, during the consumption of Surakarta's local culinary offerings contributed to improving tourists' cultural competence. Respondents rated items relating to sensory experience (SE1, SE2, SE3) very favourably, indicating that sensory engagement with local foods creates meaningful impressions, thereby increasing appreciation for local culinary culture. Sensory experiences involving smell, taste, and the visual appearance of food help create a positive impression for tourists, making it easier for them to mingle and appreciate Surakarta's traditional food; these various sensory stimuli, overall, contribute to the development of cultural competence in Surakarta's culinary culture. This finding aligns with Kim and Eves (2012) and Lin et al. (2023), who argue that sensory appeal is an effective path to cultural learning in tourism contexts.

Social experience likewise showed a strong positive influence on cultural competence ($p = 0.000$; $T = 4.996$). The high average scores on indicators such as SoE2 (mean 4.13) and SoE4 (mean 4.18) suggest that sharing meals, engaging in conversation, and interacting socially during culinary experiences in Surakarta strengthened interpersonal ties and fostered cultural understanding. The role of social experience in increasing cultural competence emerges through interactions that facilitate the exchange of information and perspectives across cultures, thereby encouraging the formation of new thought patterns. This supports the findings of Kim et al. (2020) and Weber et al. (2016), who note that social interaction helps people talk about and reflect on different cultures, thereby boosting cultural competence.

The study also found that cultural competence had a significant and positive influence on behavioral intention ($p = 0.000$; $T = 9.998$). The high mean values for

items CC4 (4.46) and CC5 (4.27) indicate that tourists who respected the cultural values embedded in traditional foods and enjoyed interacting with different cultures were more likely to exhibit positive behavioural intentions, such as leaving favourable reviews, revisiting the destination, and repurchasing local products. The higher a person's cultural competence, the more likely they are to return, recommend, or share their Surakarta culinary experience. This suggests that cultural understanding is a key factor in shaping tourist behavior. These findings align with Ahn et al. (2019) and Lin et al. (2023), suggesting that cultural competence increases motivation toward favourable tourism behaviours.

Regarding mediation, the study found that the indirect effects of novel and authentic experiences on behavioural intention through cultural competence were not significant (Novel: $p = 0.171$, $T = 0.951$; Authentic: $p = 0.139$, $T = 1.086$). This finding deviates from Ahn (2020) and Lin et al. (2023), possibly because, in this study, novel and authentic experiences did not affect cultural competence in the first place. In contrast, the mediation analyses for sensory experience and social experience indicated significant indirect effects on behavioral intention through cultural competence (Sensory: $p = 0.041$, $T = 1.735$; Social: $p = 0.000$, $T = 4.240$). These results show that sensory and social experiences while traveling in Surakarta improved cultural competence, which in turn led to behaviors such as wanting to return and leaving positive reviews. These findings indicate that novel and authentic experiences are insufficient to generate cultural competence that can influence tourist behavior. Tourists appear to require more interactive, immersive, and cognitive experiences—such as those in the sensory and social dimensions—to truly develop cultural competence and impact intentions to return, recommend, or share experiences related to local cuisine.

5.1. Managerial Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the findings are beneficial to local culinary business operators and the Surakarta municipal government. The focus is on how to foster tourists' behavioural intentions, such as revisits, repurchases, and positive word-of-mouth, through enhanced cultural competence. Since behavioural intention is crucial for the growth of the local culinary tourism sector, stakeholders should aim to cultivate tourists' cultural competence: the higher the competence, the greater the potential for behavioural intention. According to this study, the experiential routes most effective at developing cultural competence are sensory and social experiences.

To give tourists a good sensory experience, companies should preserve the original flavours of local dishes and present them appealingly. Restaurants and tourist attractions should make it easy for people to interact with one another by providing friendly service and clear information about local culture. This helps tourists understand and appreciate cultural differences, which makes them more likely to act in ways that support others. Additionally, the following research could effectively expand upon these findings by exploring how unique and authentic experiences may be more distinctly differentiated or operationalized in contexts characterized by greater cultural distance.

6. Conclusions

This study revealed that novel and authentic experiences had no significant impact on cultural competence, whereas sensory and social experiences had positive effects. Moreover, cultural competence had a substantial impact on behavioral intention, acting as a mediating variable solely in the associations between sensory and social experiences and behavioral intention.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that local restaurant owners in Surakarta should improve how they present food by incorporating elements of local culture, maintaining authentic traditional flavors, and offering friendly, helpful service that educates visitors about the cultural significance of local food. These efforts can enhance tourists' sensory experiences and cultural knowledge, encouraging them to return, buy more, and leave positive reviews that will attract more visitors.

To improve tourists' experiences with local food, the Surakarta City Government should promote the cultural value of local food by hosting traditional cooking demonstrations, using authentic cooking tools, and providing training for local food entrepreneurs. Also, there should be a greater focus on promoting Surakarta's food heritage through its history, uniqueness, and authenticity to attract tourists seeking profound, memorable experiences. These kinds of programs are meant to make people remember things that will help them learn about other cultures and change their behavior. This will help Surakarta's culinary tourism industry grow.

This study, however, has many limitations. Since most respondents were from Java Island, the findings may not apply widely. Future research is recommended to include respondents from regions outside Java, within Indonesia, to provide a broader view of cultures. Later studies should investigate the potential moderating effect of educational level on the development of cultural competence, as influenced by diverse aspects of consumption experience.

References

- Abdullah, M. (2015). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif*. Aswaja Pressindo. Yogyakarta
- Ahn, J. (2020). Understanding the role of perceived satisfaction with autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the CSR context. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(12), 2027–2043. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1788040>
- Ahn, J., Back, K.-J., & Boger, C. (2019). Effects of integrated resort experience on customers' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 43(8), 1225–1255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348019861740>
- Amira, K. (2022, August 12). 14 Makanan Khas Solo dan Ciri Khasnya, Pecinta Kuliner Wajib Coba! *Best Seller Gramedia*. <https://www.gramedia.com/best-seller/makanan-khas-solo/>
- Cheung, Y., Shah, S., & Muncer, S. (2002). An exploratory investigation of undergraduate students' perceptions of cultural awareness. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 65(12), 543–550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030802260206501203>
- Dimitrovski, D., & Crespi-Vallbona, M. (2017). Role of food neophilia in the motivational construct of food market tourists: The case of La Boqueria in Barcelona, Spain. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 34(4), 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2016.1193100>
- Fan, D. X. F., Tsaur, S.-H., Lin, J.-H., Chang, T.-Y., & Tsa, Y.-R. T. (2022). Tourist intercultural competence: A multidimensional measurement and its impact on tourist active participation and memorable cultural experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(2), 414–429. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287520982372>
- Ghozali, I. (2008). *Structural equation modeling: Metode alternatif dengan partial least square (pls)*. Badan Penerbit Universitas Diponegoro.
- Gradianto, R. A. (2022, September 27). *Pengertian Pariwisata Menurut Para Ahli, Pahami Tujuan dan Manfaatnya*. bola.com. <https://www.bola.com/ragam/read/5081289/pengertian-pariwisata-menurut-para-ahli-pahami-tujuan-dan-manfaatnya>
- Jang, S. (Shawn), & Ha, J. (2015). The influence of cultural experience: Emotions in relation to authenticity at ethnic restaurants. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 18(3), 287–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2015.1051436>
- Ji, M., Wong, I. A., Eves, A., & Scarles, C. (2016). Food-related personality traits and the moderating role of novelty-seeking in food satisfaction and travel outcomes. *Tourism Management*, 57, 387–396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.06.003>

- Kaushal, V., & Yadav, R. (2021). Understanding customer experience of culinary tourism through food tours of Delhi. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 7(3), 683–701. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-08-2019-0135>
- [Kemendagri.go.id/klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-pariwisata/cakupan-aktivitas-pariwisata-dan-ekonomi-kreatif-dalam-klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-kbli-2020](https://www.kemendagri.go.id/klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-pariwisata/cakupan-aktivitas-pariwisata-dan-ekonomi-kreatif-dalam-klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-kbli-2020). (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2025, from <https://www.kemendagri.go.id/klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-pariwisata/cakupan-aktivitas-pariwisata-dan-ekonomi-kreatif-dalam-klasifikasi-baku-lapangan-usaha-indonesia-kbli-2020>
- Kim, S. (Sam), Badu-Baiden, F., Oh, M. (Moon), & Kim, J. (2020). Effects of African local food consumption experiences on post-tasting behavior. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(2), 625–643. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-05-2019-0428>
- Kim, Y. G., & Eves, A. (2012). Construction and validation of a scale to measure tourist motivation to consume local food. *Tourism Management*, 33(6), 1458–1467. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.01.015>
- Lestari, M. (2019, April 29). *Coba Tebak Ada Berapa Jumlah Kuliner di Indonesia?* <https://food.detik.com/berita-boga/d-4529131/coba-tebak-ada-berapa-jumlah-kuliner-di-indonesia>
- Lin, B., Wang, S., Fu, X., & Yi, X. (2023). Beyond local food consumption: The impact of local food consumption experience on cultural competence, eudaimonia and behavioral intention. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 35(1), 137–158. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2022-0099>
- Liu, H., Li, H., DiPietro, R. B., & Levitt, J. A. (2018). The role of authenticity in mainstream ethnic restaurants: Evidence from an independent full-service Italian restaurant. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(2), 1035–1053. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-08-2016-0410>
- Mbah SEO. (2024, June 19). *Sejarah Pasar Gede Solo, Tempat Jual Beli Tertua di Surakarta—Tribun-Solo Wiki*. <https://tribunsolowiki.tribunnews.com/2024/06/19/sejarah-pasar-gede-solo-tempat-jual-beli-tertua-di-surakarta>
- Mentari, A. E. (2021, March 27). *15 Makanan Khas Solo yang Bisa Masuk Daftar Kulineranmu*. KOMPAS.com. <https://www.kompas.com/food/read/2021/03/27/124300875/15-makanan-khas-solo-yang-bisa-masuk-daftar-kulineranmu>
- Mohamed, M. E. A., Hewedi, M. M., Lehto, X., & Maayouf, M. (2020). Egyptian food experience of international visitors: A multidimensional approach. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(8), 2593–2611. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-02-2020-0136>
- Rachman, A., Yochanan, E., Samanlangi, A. I., & Purnomo, H. (2024). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D*. CV Saba Jaya Publisher, Karawang. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377469385_METODE_PENELITIAN_KUANTITATIF_KUALITATIF_DAN_RD
- Rohman, F. (2021, October 29). *25 Makanan Khas Solo, Kota Kuliner di Jawa Tengah—Daerah Katadata.co.id*. <https://katadata.co.id/berita/daerah/617bbee56fdb2/25-makanan-khas-solo-kota-kuliner-di-jawa-tengah>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- SoloData. (2024). *SDA - Dinas Pariwisata*. https://solodata.surakarta.go.id/sda_publik/dispar/index/0a57cb53ba59c46fc4b692527a38a87c78d84028
- Stone, M. J., Soulard, J., Migacz, S., & Wolf, E. (2018). Elements of memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(8), 1121–1132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517729758>
- Tsaur, S.-H., & Tu, J.-H. (2019). Cultural competence for tour leaders: Scale development and validation. *Tourism Management*, 71, 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.09.017>
- Weber, K., Sparks, B., & Hsu, C. H. C. (2016). The effects of acculturation, social distinctiveness, and social presence in a service failure situation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 56, 44–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.04.008>