

Enhancing Place Identity Through Food Customization and Customer Delight: Evidence from Healthy Food Restaurants

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, customization allows customers to become co-designers of a product by adding symbolic and emotional values to the product. Thus, customers' lives are shaped by the customization process and the decisions they must make. Despite the extensive body of research on customization, the influence of food customization and customer delight on place identity has not received enough empirical investigation, this study aims to fill this gap. This study aims to evaluate how food customization influences customer delight and place identity. In addition, we examine the mediation role of customer delight in the relationship between food customization and place identity. Partial-least squares structural equation modelling (Warp-PLS V.7) and SPSS 26.0 were used to analyze the data collected from 432 customers of healthy food restaurants in Riyadh. The findings show that food customization has both direct and indirect effects on place identity, given that customer delight serves as a partial mediator. The study's findings offer insightful guidance that could help restaurant managers do more to foster customers' place identification by offering them customized services that strengthen their sense of customer delight.

Keywords: food customization; customer delight; place identity; customer satisfaction; healthy food restaurant; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

I. INTRODUCTION

The size of the health and wellness industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.08% from 2024 to 2032. Many elements are propelling this growth, including increasing health consciousness (especially mental health) and government spending, the implementation of the Saudi Vision 2030 programs, higher levels of disposable income and expanding technological integration [1].

Furthermore, social and cultural norms are changing in KSA, which is quickly becoming a cultural hub [2]. The rapid growth of the Saudi health and wellness market is encouraging people to seek solutions proactively as a result of growing awareness of the advantages of leading a healthy lifestyle and concerns about chronic illnesses [1].

Emerging economies have experienced an exponential expansion in the restaurant industry due to shifting social dynamics, such as rising levels of prosperity in various societies [3]. In this context, the market for restaurants and cafes in Saudi Arabia is expanding remarkably, propelled by several factors such as the country's diverse population, growing economy and support for Vision 2030. The food service industry is projected to grow from its 2024 valuation of about \$27.18 billion to \$42.48 billion by 2029. This expansion is a result of consumers' growing demand for a wide variety of meals and superior service [4]. To reduce customer switching and increase customer loyalty in a highly competitive market like the restaurant industry, many businesses attempt to develop marketing and branding strategies [3, 5]. It is noteworthy that restaurants hold the greatest market share, and this is projected to expand at a CAGR of 8.76% between 2024 and 2029. The increased popularity of healthy dining options is driving this expansion, particularly among young people who make up a sizable portion of the Kingdom's population [4].

In the service industry, one of the most difficult endeavors in the service sector is to accommodate the diverse needs and wants of customers from different cultural backgrounds [6]. These days, customization tactics are being used by brands to provide their customers with experiences that precisely match their wants and needs. Meanwhile, customers could also successfully lessen the influence of the company's brand through customization [7]. Many businesses continue to struggle whether offering highly standardized services or completely customized ones [6]. Customers now have increasing options for customizing their purchases and companies seek to offer distinctive and customized experiences by making tools for the customization of their products and services available [8]. Customization permits customers to participate in the process of designing products tailored to their own needs and desires [7, 8].

In a competitive market, businesses should ensure a special kind of relationship with their customers to achieve favorable results (i.e., customer delight) [9]. Traditionally, customer satisfaction has been considered the primary indicator of long-term corporate success, but a large number of studies have demonstrated that there may not always be a clear correlation between satisfaction and significant behavioral outcomes [10]. Customer satisfaction is not the primary objective of businesses, but it is one way to gauge customer delight [11, 12], which correlates better with key outcomes than satisfaction [9, 10, 13]. For instance, delighted customers are more loyal, and committed, and make more repeat purchases [9], so marketing should prioritize making customers delighted, rather than just meeting their needs [13]. Increasing customer satisfaction and delighting customers is one strategy for expanding a company's sales and sustainability. Therefore, brands direct customers' actions [14]. In this sense, companies' psychological traits serve as the foundation for generating customer delight, pleasure, and joy by affecting customers' mindsets [14].

Tourism studies link place identity to place attachment [13]. Visitors can build a bond with a place by identifying with it and describing themselves about it, although this place's identity includes aspects of the place's public image [15, 16]. Place attachment reflects an affective connection between people and the surrounding environment [17]. Therefore, while there is disagreement over the precise nature of the connection between these two perspectives, it is generally agreed that place identification is a cognitive process, a part of one's self-concept and/or personal identity, whereas place attachment is an affective bond with the place [15, 18]. In the dynamic tourism environment, place attachment is crucial for maintaining the deep connections between customers and place [19].

This research attempts to fulfill the gap in prior studies. There is a lack of research done in healthy food restaurants. Most of previous studies investigated customization in specific contexts such as shoe retailing, luxury brands, smart phones premium goods and smartphones. Furthermore, there aren't much research that link customization with place identity. Therefore, this study is a starting point for future research that looks at how customized services help customers develop a sense of place identity, where they characterize themselves in terms of a specific location due to their interactions with it. Moreover, there is limited number of earlier research that investigated how customization affects customer delight and how customer delight impacts place identity in tourism, therefore our work contributes to the body of knowledge in this area. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no prior research has examined the mediating role of customer delight in the relationship between place identification and food customization. Our findings may assist managers of healthy food restaurants and service providers in understanding the importance of food customization in boosting customer delight and place identity. Furthermore, the findings might help decision-makers formulate strategies applicable to healthy food restaurants in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. FOOD CUSTOMIZATION

Customer demand has become more complex and intangible over the last 20 years, tending more to products and services that give more meaningful experiences and thereby create enduring memories [20]. Customers can now co-design a product by adding symbolic and emotional elements through customization [7]. Therefore, the process of customization and the choices that customers have to make impact on their lives [7]. Businesses have increasingly offered co-design initiatives to meet this demand and customization (modifying products according to customer's desires) has become an increasingly important topic [7, 20, 21].

Involving customers in design and production processes is a viable approach where demand is becoming more individualized [22] and companies can benefit, as customers are willing to pay more for customized products than for standard ones [23], are more likely to be loyal and not switch to competitors' products [24]. Customer benefits

from customization include satisfaction [24], participation in the design process to obtain their preferences [8, 25], making the product distinct and original [8, 26], greater feelings of uniqueness and self-monitoring [21].

Customization aims to give each customer exactly what they want and assumes this is preferable to the provision of a wide range of standard options [27]. At the highest level of customization (items made to order), three primary steps make up interaction with customers [28, 29];

1. Applies relationship marketing to raise a company's profile with potential customers;
2. Responses to orders or invitations to tender; and
3. Makes comprehensive design, procurement and production strategies [29].

In the current research, we dealt with customization as involving customers in the product's design and production process by including co-design initiatives, by altering items to meet the requirements and preferences of customers to improve customer delight and place identity.

2. CUSTOMER DELIGHT

Since the 1990s, the concept of "customer delight" has not been frequently utilized in academic research [13]. In marketing literature, there are two ways to define customer delight. I) The affect-based perspective defines customer delight as a mix of surprise and joy [30]. II) The confirmation-disconfirmation paradigm defines it as where remarkably positive performance surpasses customer expectations [31]. Furthermore, Torres & Kline [12] claimed that customer delight is a more reliable measure of customer relationship management than customer satisfaction; customer delight is the maximum level of involvement that a customer may experience.

Customer delight is linked to but differs from customer satisfaction [13]. Thus, Torres et al. [32] concluded that there are two aspects to delight. Firstly, memorable, gratifying and repeatable experiences lead to delight, which lasts longer than satisfaction. Secondly, delight is more strongly linked to customer loyalty and the intention to make repeat purchases so delighted customers are generally more loyal and likely to be retained than those who are simply satisfied [32].

In addition, Berman [33] and Jiang [13] compared customer delight and customer satisfaction and proposed that a delighted customer demands an unexpectedly high degree of satisfaction, that goes beyond customer expectations, whereas customer satisfaction occurs from delivering what is expected, and that delight is differentiated from satisfaction by the element of surprise. A pleasant event is more memorable than a simply satisfying one because it comprises excitement, happiness and enjoyment, which can be increased by surprise. Delight is completely emotional, whereas satisfaction is more intellectual, even though it involves both emotional and intellectual aspects [30]. Customers are usually satisfied when their expectations are met or exceeded, whereas delight involves a combination of surprise and enjoyment [33]. One tactic for growing a business's sales and sustainability is to delight and satisfy customers more. Thus, brands influence the behavior of customers [14].

Kao et al. [34] categorized prior studies related to customer delight into three approaches. 1) customer delight happens when a customer is positively surprised by the performance of a service, which elicits an emotional response (excitement) and the surprise causes the feeling of excitement to produce delight. 2) a needs-based approach, put forward by Schneider & Bowen [35] to investigate the main causes for customer delight, maintains that the secret to delighting customers is to meet their requirements for justice, security and self-esteem. The most important of these is the fulfilment of self-esteem because it improves feelings of self-worth. 3) delight is a psychological concept that is based on human feelings and emotional needs [36].

In the current research, we conceptualize customer delight as a positive performance that goes beyond the customer's expectations, which includes joy, surprise, and excitement.

3. PLACE IDENTITY

The term "identity" concerning places and spaces is frequently mentioned in the literature regarding place marketing and branding [37]. Marketing theory has historically put a strong emphasis on the formation of identity [38, 39], especially to places [37, 39].

In the context of branding, there have been several efforts to describe place identity [37, 39]. For example, Kalandides [37] differentiates between three categories of place identity: "identification of", where places are understood and recognized by individuals or groups who attribute unique qualities and traits to them, "being identified as", where individuals and groups are identified according to their place of origin, residence, etc., and "identification with", where individuals integrate place and their environment into the process of creating their own identities.

In other words, Rosenbaum & Montoya [40] identified place identity as the degree to which an individual's perception of a destination fits with his or her sense of identity. By using this definition, one identifies with a place where one feels at home and welcomed by other people, who are similar to oneself, and encourages others of one's community to go there as well. Similarly, Shoukat & Ramkissoon [16] defined place identity as the combination of beliefs, thoughts and perceptions someone associates with a place to differentiate it from other places, even before visiting it. On the other hand, Zou et al. [41] argued that if people's behavioral objectives are achieved once they visit a place, they feel like they belong.

Indeed, the term "place identity" has many forms (local, territorial, spatial, etc.) and is used in many contexts: it can simply be another name for a place image, but in other contexts, it can be linked to local culture [37]. According to Hanna & Rowley [42], place identity is the beginning point for creating a place brand's core values. In addition, place identity helps in generating and maintaining individual continuity, self-efficacy, and self-esteem [43].

Furthermore, the idea of place identity has been approached from a variety of points of view since it was first proposed; the social perspective points out the nature of connections among people, places, and identities, while the individualistic perspective concentrates on how place affects residents' identities [44, 45]. The third approach dealt with the social and individualistic perspectives as interrelated approaches. Bernardo et al. [45] identified place identity as those aspects of social and personal identity that are shared by groups associated with a particular location and are linked to the sense of belonging to the place.

In this research, we conceptualize place identity as how people describe or view themselves in their physical environment through enhancing customers' feelings of uniqueness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1. FOOD CUSTOMIZATION AND PLACE IDENTITY

Haven-Tang & Jones [46] argued that offering regional cuisine and beverages creates a sense of place, which provides a distinctive traveler experience and sets tourist destinations apart, based on their unique social and cultural characteristics [46]. This is reinforced by cognitive appraisal theory (CAT), which explains how evaluating an event elicits emotions by evaluating a stimulus, which then causes emotions to be felt either positively or negatively [47, 48].

As indicated by Shoukat & Ramkissoon [16], place identity is based on four key aspects: making a place feel distinctive or unique, making people feel proud when they visit a place, and promoting consistency and self-efficacy, which is the conviction that one can act appropriately in a given circumstance. Consequently, when a healthy restaurant meets its customers' expectations and satisfies their needs by offering customized services, it can enhance those customers' feelings of self-distinctiveness, self-esteem, sense of personal worth, and self-efficacy, thereby fostering place identity. Consequently, Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis.

H1: food customization has a positive effect on place identity.

2. FOOD CUSTOMIZATION AND CUSTOMER DELIGHT

According to Choo et al. [49], customization is the degree to which a brand matches customer expectations and preferences. Thus, when a customer feels satisfied as a result, he or she feels delighted. This is confirmed by cognitive appraisal theory (CAT), which figures out how an assessment of an experience evokes emotions by assessing a stimulus, which then results in negative or positive feelings [47, 48]. In this research, customization is considered as a stimulus and customer delight represents positive emotions.

In this regard, Ma et al. [50] used CAT in interpreting customer delight as it aroused because the customer evaluated a situation which leads to delight emotions. Furthermore, Kim et al. [51] suggested that there is a significant positive correlation between customization and customer delight. Consequently, the following hypothesis is put forth for this study.

H2: food customization has a positive effect on customer delight.

3. CUSTOMER DELIGHT AND PLACE IDENTITY

Tourism has experienced an increase in the derivation of place identity from place attachment [13]. In this regard, Shoukat & Ramkissoon [16] showed that, in a tourism environment, one of the most important ways that visitors can build a bond is place identification. In this regard, place identity is frequently utilized to describe visitor behavior or attitudinal intentions in tourism studies [52].

According to Hernández et al. [15] place identity in tourism is the procedure by which a person connects with a destination while travelling and characterizes themselves in terms of "belonging to a particular place," which he believed to be a component of personal identity. According to brand relationship theory, customers tend to consider their brand as a partner, if they feel satisfied. Consequently, customers view their interactions with a brand as a human relationship, where the quality of the relationship is determined by mutual satisfaction [53]. So, if customers are satisfied with this relationship, they become emotionally attached to the brand [54]. As customer delight demands an unexpectedly high degree of satisfaction (through unexpected, positive occurrences), that goes beyond customer's expectations [13, 33], delight can lead to improving customers' feeling of a sense of place identity.

Shoukat & Ramkissoon [16] proposed that customer delight has a positive impact on place identity in the tourism industry, although it is uncommon for research to consider the direct relationship. Likewise, Ali et al. [55] showed that customer delight with a destination forms the foundation of place identification. Furthermore, Jiang [13] investigated place identity as a moderator: people who experience delight, in a place with which they identify strongly, participate in positive word-of-mouth recommendations, a moderating effect probably resulting from a desire not to dilute the feeling of authenticity they experience by encouraging more people to visit. In the light of the previous arguments, the following hypothesis is developed.

H3: customer delight has a positive effect on place identity.

4. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CUSTOMER DELIGHT

Healthy food has emerged as a priority in today's society, representing a healthy culture. According to social identity theory [56], customers, acting in the context of social structures, name one another and themselves according to the perceived occupation of positions (roles) in those structures. This naming evokes meaning in the form of expectations about others and one's behavior [57]. In this regard, customers pay more attention to healthy food and demand customized services that match their expectations. According to CAT [47, 48], when customers encounter customized services, they feel delighted, which results in enhancing the feelings of place identity. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis to investigate the effect of customer delight as a mediator in the relationship between food customization and place identity.

H4: customer delight acts as a mediator in the relationship between food customization and place identity.

5. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Food customization is an important factor in the hospitality sector. This research proposed a research model (see Figure 1) that examines the effect of food customization on place identity and customer delight, the effect of customer delight on place identity, and customer delight mediates the relationship between food customization and place identity.

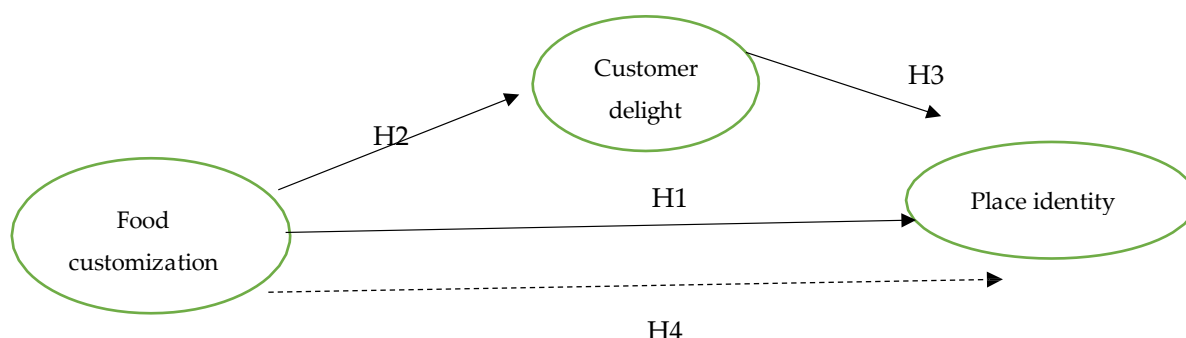


FIGURE 1. The proposed research model.

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

This study investigates the relationship between food customization, customer delight and place identity in Saudi healthy restaurants. This focus has been chosen for the following reasons.: 1) the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is rapidly becoming a cultural center and witnessing shifts in both social and cultural norms [2]. 2) KSA is striving to expand its non-oil economy and become a more popular tourism destination and investment target, as part of its Vision 2030 strategy, which aims to diversify the economy, lessen reliance on oil and develop education,

health, infrastructure, recreation and tourism sectors [2]. 3) the Saudi health and wellness market is expanding significantly due to people's increasing knowledge of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and concern about chronic illnesses, so people are actively looking for solutions [1]. 4) there is an increasing popularity of healthy dining options, particularly among young people, who make up a sizable portion of the Kingdom's population [4].

In addition, this study considers restaurants for two reasons. 1) the market for restaurants and cafes in Saudi Arabia is expanding remarkably, propelled by several factors, such as the country's diverse population, growing economy and support for Vision 2030 [2]. 2) the food service industry is projected to grow from its 2024 valuation of about \$27.18 billion to \$42.48 billion by 2029. This expansion is a result of consumers' growing need for a wide variety of meals and superior service. It is noteworthy that restaurants hold the greatest market share, which is predicted to rise at a CAGR of 8.76% between 2024 and 2029 [4].

The population for the study is all the customers of healthy food restaurants in Riyadh. The study's participants were customers who regularly visited the most famous ten healthy restaurants in Riyadh [58]. This study used convenience sampling as one of the non-probability samples, as there is no framework of the population, and geographical proximity, and easy accessibility to the researcher [59]. The researchers argued that the study's population is more than 100,000 individuals, whereas the number of the population in Riyadh city is 8,591,748 million people [60]. So, the minimum number of the sample is 384 individuals, with a confidence factor of 95% and a significance level of 5% [61]. According to Saunders et al. (2011) [59], to collect the minimum sample size, it is important to distribute a larger number by focusing on the expected response ($n_a = n \times 100 / re$), where (n_a) refers to the actual sample size, (n) refers to the required minimum sample size, (re) refers to the percentage of the expected response (=75%) based on previous studies [62, 63]. By applying the equation ($384 \times 100 / 75$). Thus, the sample is 512 customers.

The data was collected using a paper questionnaire, which was distributed to participants, who filled it in themselves and collected manually. 512 questionnaires were collected between March and June 2024, and 432 of those 512 had valid responses, which represents a response rate of 84.4 % and is suitable for our study. The sample profile of the 432 respondents is shown in Table 1. The results of the Harman single-factor test indicate that one component accounted for 37.4% of the total variance, which is less than 50% and so within the permissible range [64]. Consequently, there is no common methodological bias. The data was analyzed by using SPSS 26.0 and partial least squares structural equation modelling in Warp-PLS V. 7.

Table 1. Sample profile.

Sample profile (n = 432)	Number	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	239	55.3
Female	193	44.7
Age (years)		
18-24	148	34.3
25-34	131	30.3
35-44	137	31.7
45 or above	16	3.7
Income (monthly)		
3000 < 5000 (SAR)	101	23.4
5000 < 8000 (SAR)	78	18.1
8000 < 10000 (SAR)	141	32.6
10000 < (SAR)	112	25.9
Number of visits		
Fewer than 3 times	114	26.4%
4-6 times	214	49.6%
More than 6 times	104	24 %

2. MEASUREMENTS

The questionnaire was divided in two sections, with the first covering questions on food customization, customer delight and place identity, assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The second section of the questionnaire covered such demographic variables as gender, age, income and number of visits during the year to date. A pilot sample of 30 respondents was collected to ensure the questionnaire's reliability before collecting actual data. The Cronbach's Alphas of food customization, customer delight and place identity were 0.882, 0.844 and 0.819, respectively. These values were all greater than 0.7, indicating that all the constructs were internally consistent [65].

Food customization was assessed by using items from Fornell et al. [66] and Ball et al. [67], with items 4 and 5 designed by the researchers to be tailored to healthy food restaurants. Customer delight was measured using five items developed by Kim et al. [68]. Place identity was assessed adopting five items from Jorgensen & Stedman [69] and Ramkissoon et al. [70].

V. RESULTS

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used, as a practical and popular statistical analysis method [71]. Partial least squares (PLS) were employed to assess the suggested model (Figure 1), with Warp-PLS V.7. PLS was employed for the following reasons [61] 1) it reduces residual variances of dependent variables. 2) it overcomes issues with multi-collinearity and normal distribution. 3) it facilitates comprehension of the correlation between causes and prediction, particularly in marketing research. The statistical analysis had two steps [61]: evaluation of the measurement model's validity and reliability, and examination of the structural model.

1. MEASUREMENT MODEL EVALUATION (MME)

The skewness and kurtosis were calculated for each measurement item; the normality of the data has been assessed. The values did not show any deviation from normal [72]. To confirm that there is no issue of multicollinearity issue, we used the variance inflation factor (VIF) represents the degree of multicollinearity in regression analysis. Multicollinearity occurs when there is a correlation between several independent variables in a multiple regression model. This may negatively impact the regression's findings [71]. All VIF results fell within the acceptable range (lower than 3), ranging from 1.78 to 2.12 [71].

In the measurement model evaluation, we assessed validity and reliability. Chin (1998) [73] stated that the general validity indicators were discriminant and convergent validity, and the internal consistency reliability were composed of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR). Table 2 demonstrates that each construct item had a loading greater than 0.70, indicating the reliability of all our indicators [73]. The values of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) were found to be greater than 0.7, indicating that all constructs were internally consistent [65]. Convergent validity was also confirmed by the fact that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than 0.50, which confirms that all constructs were had convergent validity [74]. See Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is a measure that compares the amount of variance caused by measurement error to the amount of variance captured by a construct [74].

Table 2. Convergent validity and internal consistency.

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis		Loading	Alpha	CR	AVE
			Statistic	Standard Error	Statistic	Standard Error				
Food customization								0.781	0.797	0.551
"My restaurant" offers me products and services that satisfy my specific needs.	4.52	0.657	-1.099	0.117	0.243	0.234	0.708			

"My restaurant" offers products and services that I couldn't find in another restaurant.	4.23	0.775	-0.907	0.117	1.083	0.234	0.701			
If I changed from restaurant, I wouldn't obtain products and services as personalized as I have no	4.04	0.909	-0.739	0.117	0.199	0.234	0.713			
My restaurant contacts me to determine the	4.02	0.916	-0.901	0.117	0.720	0.234	0.702			
meal ingredients.										
My restaurant offers each customer special meals that suit his/ her needs.	4.13	0.826	-0.911	0.117	1.168	0.234	0.738			
Customer delight								0.785	0.854	0.541
I am delighted by my experiences at this restaurant.	4.27	0.853	-1.231	0.117	1.496	0.234	0.764			
This restaurant provides more than I have expected.	4.01	0.867	-0.864	0.117	0.932	0.234	0.816			
I feel positively surprised by what I have experienced at this restaurant.	4.11	0.808	-0.501	0.117	-0.413	0.234	0.885			
I thoroughly enjoy my interaction with others at this restaurant.	4.04	0.845	-0.744	0.117	0.577	0.234	0.730			

This restaurant offers experiences that exceed what I have imagined.	4.13	0.847	-0.921	0.117	0.883	0.234	0.759		
Place identity								0.710	0.812
Visiting this restaurant says a lot about who I am.	4.43	0.708	-0.956	0.117	0.048	0.234	0.756		
I feel this restaurant is part of me.	4.13	0.778	-0.705	0.117	0.549	0.234	0.776		
This restaurant is very special to me.	4.21	0.761	-0.660	0.117	0.052	0.234	0.765		
I identify strongly with this restaurant.	4.15	0.794	-0.630	0.117	-0.034	0.234	0.784		
There is congruence between this restaurant and my self-identity.	4.19	0.769	-0.760	0.117	-0.623	0.234	0.820		

In order to evaluate discriminant validity, we confirmed that each reflective construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs, which are displayed in Table 3. All constructs met the standards set forth by Fornell & Larcker (1981) [74]. In general, the measurement model has attained discriminant validity, convergent validity, internal consistency and general reliability, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 3. Construct correlations and square root of average variance extracted.

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
1. Food customization	4.18	0.545	0.742		
2. Customer delight	4.11	0.619	0.657	0.736	
3. Place identity	4.22	0.518	0.630	0.684	0.750

The AVEs in bold on the diagonal are the square roots. Simple bivariate correlations between the constructs are represented in the other cells.

2. STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION

Tenenhaus GoF (GoF), Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR), R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR), statistical suppression ratio (SSR), and nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR) are five model fitting parameters that are used prior to testing the model. The GoF is an overall measure of model fit and should be greater than 0.36 [75]; the value of GOF is 0.484 which is greater than 0.36 [75]; the SPR = 1 (appropriate if ≥ 0.7) [76]; the RSCR = 1, ideal (reasonable if ≥ 0.9) [75]; the SSR = 1 (acceptable if ≥ 0.7); and the NLBCDR = 1 (appropriate if ≥ 0.7) [77]. Thus, the structural model fit was validated.

3. TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

Hair et al. [71] stated that evaluating the structural model requires examining the effect sizes (f^2), the predictive relevance (Q^2), the beta (β) and related p-values, and the R^2 .

As indicated, Cohen (2013) [78] stated that good f^2 should be more than 2%. Food customization affects place identity positively ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.197$), supporting H1. Food customization also has a positive impact on customer delight ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.442$), confirming H2. Customer delight affects place identity positively ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.334$), so H3 is accepted. There is also a significant indirect effect of food customization on place identity, partially mediated by customer delight ($\beta = 0.32$; $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.205$). Thus, H4 is supported (See Table 4).

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results.

	Standard β	p-value	Support
Direct effects			
H1: FC \rightarrow PI	0.31	0.001	Yes
H2: FC \rightarrow CD	0.66	0.001	Yes
H3: CD \rightarrow PI	0.48	0.001	Yes
	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
H4: FC \rightarrow CD \rightarrow PI	0.31**	0.32**	0.63**
			Yes

Note: FC = food customization; PI = place identity; CD = customer delight. * $P < 0.001$

The coefficient of determination (R^2 value) was assessed in order to test the predictive power of the model. Food customization explains 44% of customer delight and 53% of place identity. Thus, the model has good predictive power because all R^2 values are greater than 10% [79]. R^2 was thus a reliable predictor of the structural model. Q^2 was used, in addition, to assess the predictive validity of the structural model. The values of Q^2 are 0.441 and 0.531, respectively, for customer delight and place identity, which exceed zero [71], so that the condition is met. All the hypotheses, H1 to H4, are supported by the findings (see Figure 2).

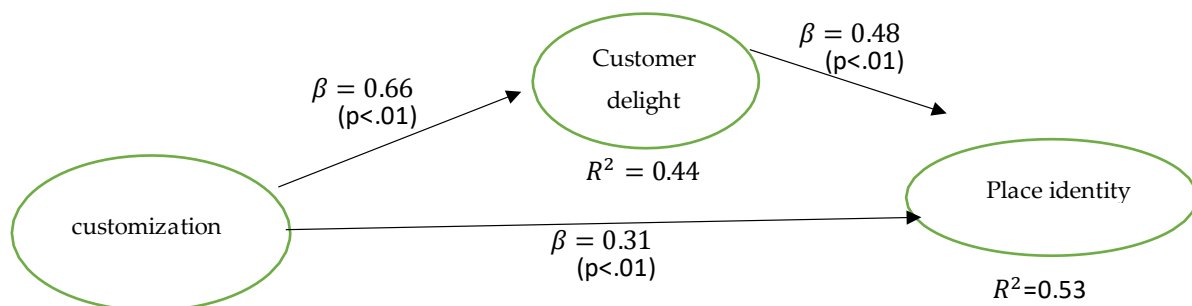


FIGURE 2. PLS for research model paths.

VI. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. CONCLUSION

This research has explored how customer delight might mediate the effect of food customization on place identity in healthy food restaurants in Riyadh. The results show that food customization is positively related to place identity, which is, in general, consistent with Haven-Tang & Jones [46], who assert that customized services help in improving sense of place. In this study, food customization has a positive effect on customer delight. Choo et al. [49] and Kim et al. [51] argued that, when customers feel satisfied with customized services, they feel delighted. According to cognitive appraisal theory (CAT), customization is a stimulus that evokes positive emotions, like customer delight and place identity. In this instance, customers felt emotionally connected to the place and they feel delighted because they believed that the brand met their wants and expectations.

The present study has also shown that customer delight has a positively impacted place identity, which agrees with Ali et al. [55] and Shoukat & Ramkissoon [16], who suggested that the foundation of place identification would be delight of the customer with the destination.

Finally, this study showed that customer delight has a partial mediation role in the relationship between food customization and place identity. According to CAT [38-39], when customers experience customized services, they are delighted, which in turn leads to them to feel greater place identity.

2. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The primary goal of this research is to enhance current knowledge by investigating how consumers develop place identity based on food customization and customer delight. However, previous studies applied customization in limited contexts, such as shoe retailing [8, 80], luxury brands [81] or smart phones [82], and there is a dearth of research conducted in healthy food restaurants. Thus, this research presents empirical evidence that can be employed to comprehend the consequences of food customization in healthy food restaurants.

Additionally, there is a scarcity of studies that connect place identification to customization. For instance, Haven & Jones [46] study found a positive correlation between customization and sense of place, but, to the researchers' knowledge, no previous studies have examined the effect of customization on place identification. This study therefore serves as a beginning point for future research that examines how customized services foster customers' place identity, where they consider the place as a part of their personal identity [16] and describe themselves in terms of a particular place because of their interactions with it [15]. In this instance, customers describe themselves as healthy individuals who live a healthy lifestyle.

Moreover, prior studies that examined the impact of customization on customer delight were conducted in restaurant interactive self-service [49] and in hotels [51]. The current study therefore explores this relationship in a context that has not been examined before (i.e., healthy food restaurants). Furthermore, there is limited research on the impact of customer delight on place identification in tourism [16, 55], so that the present study adds to the body of knowledge in this field.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, the mediating role of consumer delight in the relationship between food customization and place identity has not been studied before. For example, Kim et al. [51] addressed there is a positive relationship between customization and customer delight. Jiang [13] investigated the moderating role of place identity in the connection between customer delight and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Furthermore, despite a great number of studies in various types of restaurants, such as fast-food, casual dining and fine dining, relatively little has been conducted in healthy food restaurants. Finally, the majority of studies have been carried out in developed countries and few in developing countries, particularly not in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research have positive ramifications for Saudi Arabia's emerging healthy food restaurants sector. First, our research has shown that food customization has a beneficial effect on place identity. According to Haven-Tang & Jones [46], in order to foster a sense of place, a restaurant should be customized selectively to concentrate on the destination's unique social and cultural characteristics. As a result, restaurant managers should allow customers to create their dishes and design a unique menu. Moreover, managers should connect customization with the restaurant's mission, vision and values, such as sustainability and encouraging healthy lifestyles, which reinforce place identity. In addition, managers can use customization to stimulate creativity and adaptation to social and cultural change, which may become part of the restaurant's identity. Managers should organize events that focus on customization, which may generate unique experiences that are connected to the restaurant's identity. Managers can encourage customers to post their customized meals on social media and foster social interaction among diners, which could in turn improve customers' feelings of place identity. Therefore, by applying customization, healthy restaurants may establish a strong brand identity.

Second, the current study has demonstrated that food customization positively impacts customer delight. In this regard, restaurant managers should apply customization in a way that enhances customers' feelings of delight. This can be achieved by allowing customers to create meals as a way of attaining healthy goals. In this context, managers should apply customization which helps customers to adjust their dishes in a way that reduces dietary requirements, such as paleo, vegan or gluten-free and allow customer to choose ingredients that are matched with their healthy goals. Thus, by embracing customization, healthy restaurants can enhance customers' feelings of delight.

Finally, the current study has found that customer delight has a positive effect on place identity. Restaurant managers should enhance customer delight to improve place identity, giving their customers delightful experiences, which contribute to a distinctive place identity, and which coincide with the restaurant's wellness and health mission, thus enhancing its identity as a health-conscious business. Consequently, delighted customers encourage restaurants to innovate and design their menus based on customer feedback and suggestions, which can then become part of the restaurant's identity. Thus, by prioritizing customer delight, healthy restaurants can build distinctive and unique place identity.

4. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This research has limitations that might be examined in future studies. First, the study's results are limited to the Saudi context. Further research should be carried out in other nations. Second, this study considered healthy food restaurants. Future studies could look at customization in education, air travel, hotels and healthcare. Third, while this research is cross-sectional in nature, a longitudinal study may be carried out in future studies. Fourth, future research could investigate the effect of food customization on other variables, such as customer engagement, value co-creation and customer experience. Fifth, future studies could examine customization in the on-line context, as well as the use of artificial intelligence applications to customize products and services. Sixth, future research may take demographics, brand involvement and brand uniqueness into account as moderators. Finally, future studies may investigate the effect of customer happiness and customer satisfaction as mediators and can examine the effect of social media marketing on customer delight and place identity.

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Author contribution

All authors made an equal contribution to the development and planning of the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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