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HOW CROWDS OF PEOPLE IN A RESTAURANT CAN BUILD THE RESTAURANT'S IMAGE AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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Abstract. Restaurant crowds are common these days, especially in popular restaurants. This is characterized by the number of visitors who want to eat at the restaurant. The crowd of a restaurant occurs because many people are enthusiastic and curious to visit the restaurant. The crowd of a restaurant can determine consumer behavior in the long run, and can even create an image of the restaurant. This study aims to examine the relationship between crowds, restaurant image, brand trust, brand attachment, and customer satisfaction. The data collection technique in this study was carried out using an online questionnaire (google form) distributed to 250 respondents who had visited a Mie Gacoan Restaurant in Malang City. Data processing was carried out using the SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Square) method with WarpPLS 8.0 software. The results showed that the human crowding variable has a significant influence on restaurant image. In addition, restaurant image also significantly affects brand trust and brand attachment, and brand trust and brand attachment also significantly affect customer satisfaction. Based on the results of the study, business actors are expected to improve service quality, such as responsiveness in serving crowded restaurants so that later they can improve the image of the restaurant.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Restaurant Image, Human Crowding, SEM-PLS

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INTRODUCTION

Many residents in Malang City make restaurants crowded every day, especially in popular restaurants. In addition, crowded restaurants are also due to the lifestyle of today's young people who often do eating out activities. Eating out is usually done by young people especially students, because of their busy daily routines, the existence of various dining options in the form of restaurants or cafes in the city center, the desire to socialize and fill their spare time, as well as the variety and taste of the food served (Fajarni, 2019). According to Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Timur (2023), the number of students in Malang City in 2022 was 30,640 from public and private universities. It means there are many students in Malang City.

In addition, the attractiveness of restaurants, such as their comfortable place design, strategic location, and supporting facilities such as Wi-Fi, can increase people's penchant for eating out. Eating out is considered a modern lifestyle that meets the needs of socialization and entertainment; after doing so, they expect to feel pleasure and satisfaction. The large number of students and college students and their penchant for eating out can cause restaurants to become crowded. However, crowded restaurants can result in human crowding due to the many visitors who want to eat on the spot. According to Quan et al., (2021) human density is the density of individuals in a place.

Crowding in a restaurant is often one of the critical factor consumers' use in evaluating a restaurant's popularity and creating a good image of the restaurant (Quan et al., 2021). When consumers see a very crowded restaurant, they will associate the level of crowdedness with high food quality, low prices, and also a good image of the restaurant (Wang et al., 2021). When a restaurant can provide a good image in terms of price, product quality, atmosphere, physical environment, and service, it can increase consumer trust, attachment, and satisfaction. The satisfaction consumers feel is essential in retaining consumers and long-term behavior.

One of the most popular spicy noodle restaurants in Malang is Mie Gacoan. This restaurant can be a recommendation for students and college students to gather together. This restaurant provides complete facilities such as Wi-Fi, music, bathrooms, prayer rooms, and a modern and contemporary restaurant building. This restaurant's popularity will cause crowds due to the large number of visitors who eat there, especially during weekends, breaks, and evenings. The density of the restaurant due to the crowds of visitors can lead to less than optimal service, often inappropriate orders, inconsistent food flavors, and unresponsive employees in serving consumers. These problems must be considered by the restaurant in order to maintain customer satisfaction.

Similar studies examine the effect of human and spatial crowding on brand image and word of mouth (Putri et al., 2023; Quan et al., 2021). There is also supporting research that examines crowding on consumer satisfaction and loyalty Milman et al., 2020; Nian et al. (2023) which discusses the effect of crowding on customer satisfaction and brand attachment on customer satisfaction. However, there is no need to combine the variables of human crowding, restaurant image, brand trust, attachment, and customer satisfaction. Thus, this research is interesting, and it is hoped to provide an overview of strategies for restaurants to continue increasing customer satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of human crowding on restaurant image, analyze the effect of restaurant image on brand trust and brand attachment, and analyze the effect of brand trust and brand attachment on customer satisfaction. The results of this study are expected to contribute to several parties, namely providing an overview and input to the restaurant regarding what indicators are influential in improving the image of a restaurant and increasing customer satisfaction.

METHOD

This research chose one of the most popular spicy noodle restaurants in Malang, namely Mie Gacoan. Respondents were determined using non-probability sampling techniques with accidental sampling methods, namely sampling techniques based on chance. Anyone who happened to be at the location and met the researcher could be used as a sample if the person met the criteria as a data source (Meidatuzzahra, 2019). This research requires two months, from October to November 2023. The number of respondents used in this study was 250 respondents. The data obtained were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) by utilizing WarpPLS 8.0 software. The Table 1 show the indicators used in this study.

Table 1. Indicator variable

Variable	Indicator	Code
Crowdedness (CRWD)	Many people are in the restaurant	CRWD 1
	Crowded restaurant conditions	CRWD 2
	Crowding and queuing at the restaurant	CRWD 3
Restaurant Image (RI)	Restaurant atmosphere	RI 1
	Quality of food	RI 2
	Interior design of a restaurant	RI 3
	Restaurant services	RI 4
	Comparable price	RI 5
Brand Trust (BT)	Fulfillment of customer expectations	BT 1
	Consistency between words and actions	BT 2
	Restaurants can provide solutions	BT 3
Brand Attachment (BA)	Enthusiastic feeling	BA 2
	Feelings of pleasure	BA 2
	Have emotional attachment with the restaurant	BA 3
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	Price satisfaction	CS 1
	Food satisfaction	CS 2
	Service satisfaction	CS 3

Source: Daga, 2018; Muksininna & Ratnasari, 2022; Pandiangan et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2023; Quan et al., 2021.

The hypothesis in this study is written as follows:

H1 : Crowdedness has a significant and positive effect on restaurant image

H2 : Restaurant image has a significant and positive effect on brand trust

H3 : Restaurant image has a significant and positive effect on brand attachment

H4 : Brand trust has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction

H5 : Brand attachment has n significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study used 250 respondents grouped by gender, age, occupation, income, and frequency of purchase. All respondents in this study were consumers who had visited the restaurant in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Criteria	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women	181	72
	Men	69	28
Age	16-20 years	60	24
	21-25 years	165	66
	26-30 years	21	8
	>30 years	4	2
Occupation	Students	187	75
	Employee	27	11
	Entrepreneur	11	4
	Other	25	10
Income	< 500.000	48	19
	500.000 – 1.000.000	98	39
	1.000.000 – 2.000.000	59	24
	2.000.000 – 3.000.000	21	8
	> 3.000.000	24	10
Frequency of Visit	1-2	41	17
	3-4	71	28

Characteristics	Criteria	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	5-6	55	22
	>6	83	33

Source: Data Processed, 2023

Women dominate the respondents who filled out the questionnaires in this study. Women prefer to do shopping activities, be it food, drinks, clothing, etc., compared to men. Women tend to choose restaurants that are comfortable and clean and like restaurant design, while men pay less attention to such things (Marsellita et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the dominant respondents in this study were teenagers aged 21-25 years. Nowadays, teenagers prefer to eat out with their friends rather than eat at home. Eating out activities carried out by teenagers are called eating out. According to the results of research Fajarni (2019), adolescents will eat out 2 to 3 times a week with their group to maintain solidarity with their peers who cannot meet every day or because of fatigue after doing learning activities for adolescents who are still students. In accordance with the results of the research Suastuti (2018), most respondents visit restaurants in addition to eating as well as meeting and socializing with friend.

The average consumer who visits the restaurant is a teenager or adult who is still a student who is studying, in accordance with the fact that Malang City is an educational city that has several favorite universities. It is also supported by the price of the food offered, which tends to be cheap, so students are very enthusiastic about visiting the restaurant. In line with Wijaya in Pinilih & Shaferi (2015) which states that affordable food prices can be the main choice of students in choosing a place to eat.

Consumers dominated respondents in this study with a salary or income of IDR 500,000 - IDR 1,000,000 per month. It indicates that the prices offered by this restaurant are very affordable, ranging from IDR 10,000 - to IDR 13,000 for noodle and dimsum variants so that consumers who make purchases are visitors at the middle economic level. In line with research (Anggraini & Santhoso, 2019), there are differences in consumptive behavior based on income. It means that consumers' selection of a restaurant is also based on the budget or money they have. Students and students, on average, have an allowance of no more than IDR 1,000,000, so they will choose medium-sized restaurants at affordable prices.

Furthermore, researchers need to know the frequency of purchases made because, usually, consumers who are satisfied with a restaurant will make repeat purchases. Based on the results of the study, the frequency of purchases > 6 times in the last year dominated in this study. It means that all respondents used in this study are making purchases at the restaurant quite frequently. Consumer satisfaction with product quality, service, restaurant atmosphere, and price can determine whether consumers will make repeat purchases or not.

Analysis Result PLS-SEM (*Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling*)

Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) is used to calculate the influence that arises from the relationship between variables processed based on the results of data collection. In the SEM-PLS analysis method, there are two important evaluation stages that must be carried out, namely the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The following are the results of each evaluation obtained in this study.

Outer Model

Three criteria in assessing the outer model are Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Reliability Testing. The following are the results of testing the outer model based on each criterion.

Convergent Validity

The first criterion is convergent validity, which is determined by looking at the outer loading value on all indicators and through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. According to (Hair et al., 2022), the standardization of the outer loading value must be at least 0.7 or higher. Based on the tests carried out, the value of the convergent validity test based on outer loading is present in the Table 3.

Table 3. Results of convergent validity test outer loading

Indicator	Factor Loading	P-Values
CRWD 1	(0.817)	<0.001
CRWD 2	(0.718)	<0.001
CRWD 3	(0.755)	<0.001
RI 1	(0.792)	<0.001
RI 2	(0.757)	<0.001
RI 3	(0.759)	<0.001
RI 4	(0.704)	<0.001
RI 5	(0.859)	<0.001
BT 1	(0.869)	<0.001
BT 2	(0.875)	<0.001
BT 3	(0.842)	<0.001
BA 2	(0.849)	<0.001
BA 2	(0.846)	<0.001
BA 2	(0.859)	<0.001
CS 1	(0.767)	<0.001
CS 2	(0.826)	<0.001
CS 3	(0.773)	<0.001

Source: Data Processed, 2023

The table 3 shows that all indicators have an outer loading value above 0.7. Each indicator in each latent variable has a good level of validity and significance because it has a loading value greater than 0.7. What was stated (Hair et al., 2022), an indicator can be said to be valid when it has an outer loading value of more than 0.7. In addition, convergent validity testing can also be seen through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value provided that the AVE value must be greater than 0.5 show in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of convergent validity test Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Crowdedness (CRWD)	0,584
Restaurant Image (RI)	0,600
Brant Trust (BT)	0,743
Brand Attachment (BA)	0,725
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0,623

Data Processed, 2023

Based on the Table 4, all variables used in this study meet the rule of thumb, namely having an AVE value above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022). It means that when the AVE value is more than 0.5, on average, all constructs explain more than half of the variance of their indicators so that all indicators can reflect their latent variables well.

Discriminant Validity

The following criterion used in measuring the outer model is Discriminant Validity. Discriminant Validity can be seen based on the square root value of the average variance extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al., (2022), the square root value of the AVE of each construct must be greater than the

correlation of the other constructs. If the square root value of the AVE of each construct is greater than the correlation value between other constructs, it is said to have good Discriminant Validity value (Anuraga et al., 2017).

Table 5. Results of discriminant validity square root AVE

Indicator	CRWD	RI	BT	BA	CS
CRWD	(0.764)	0.674	0.464	0.551	0.416
RI	0.674	(0.774)	0.699	0.767	0.589
BT	0.464	0.699	(0.862)	0.727	0.720
BA	0.551	0.767	0.727	(0.851)	0.633
CS	0.416	0.589	0.720	0.633	(0.789)

Source: Data Processed, 2023

The Table 5 shows that all square root values on a construct are greater than those on other constructs. For example, construct CRWD has a square root value of 0.764, greater than the value of the other constructs below it. It means that it shows that testing the square root value of the AVE of all variables has been fulfilled and is said to have a good discriminant validity value.

Reliability

The following criterion is reliability testing, which can be seen through the Composite Reliability value and Cronbach's Alpha. Composite reliability measures the reliability value of a construct and estimates the consistency of a construct. Meanwhile, Cronbach alpha measures the lower limit of the reliability value of a construct. According to Hair et al. (2022), composite reliability vary between 0 and 1, where higher values indicate a higher level of reliability. Meanwhile, the Cronbach's Alpha test must have a value of more than 0.6 so that it can be said to be reliable (Solimun et al., 2017). The result of reliability test expressed by Table 6.

Table 6. Results of reliability test

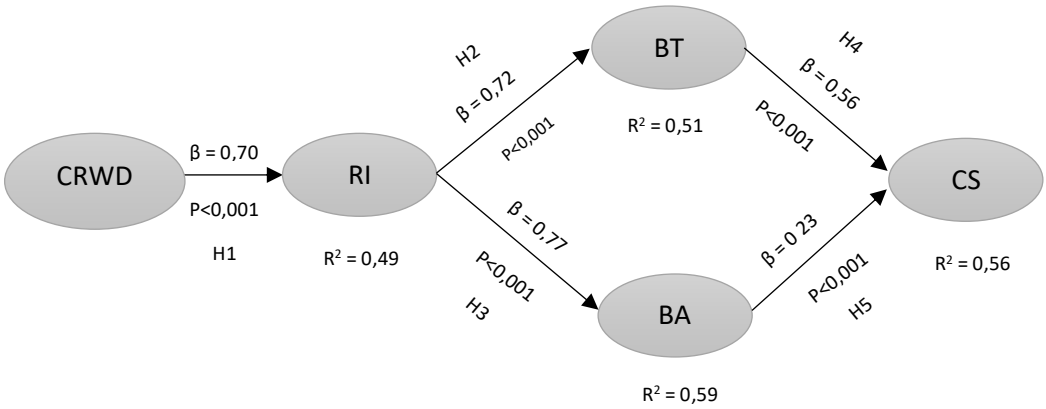
Latent Variable	Composite Reliability	Alpha Cronbach
Crowdedness (CRWD)	0,808	0,642
Restaurant Image (RI)	0,882	0,8333
Brand Trust (BT)	0,897	0,827
Brand Attachment (BA)	0,888	0,810
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0,832	0,697

Source: Data Processed, 2023

Based on the Table 6, it can be seen that all latent variables have a composite reliability value greater than 0.7. Thus, all variables used in this study have good reliability. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha value on all variables is above 0.6, so it has good reliability, too.

Inner Model

Inner model testing can be seen on the path coefficients, R-squares, and Goodness of Fit values. Path coefficient is used in testing the significance of the relationship between constructs in the structural model. According to (Hair et al., 2022), the path coefficient is standardized with a value range of -1 to +1. A value close to +1 indicates a strong positive relationship, while getting closer to 0 indicates a weak relationship. The path coefficient value in structural model expressed by Figure 1.



Source: Data Processed, 2023

Figure 1. Path coefficient value in structural model

Based on the Figure 1, all variables have a path coefficient value close to +1, and none are harmful, so all variables used have a positive relationship. For example, the relationship between human crowding and restaurant image has a path coefficient of 0.70. It shows that the human crowding variable and brand image have a positive relationship. The inner model can also be seen through the R-Square value, which ranges from 0 to 1, where the higher the value, the higher the strength of the relationship of a variable. For example, the R-Square value for restaurant image (RI) is 0.49. It shows that the contribution of human crowding (CRWD) in restaurants to restaurant image (RI) is 49%, and other variables outside the model influence the rest. Then, the next step is to see the value of Goodness of Fit.

According to Solimun et al. (2017), the Goodness of the Fit Model in WarpPLS can be seen based on ten indicators of Model Fit and Quality Indicates, which is an index of the goodness of the relationship between latent variables related to their assumptions. Based on this test, the values obtained (APC = 0.595 P < 0.0001, ARS = 0.538 P < 0.0001, AARS = 0.535 P < 0.0001, AVIF = 2.132, AFVIF = 2.705, GOF = 0.594, SPR = 1.000, RSCR = 1.000, SSR (1.000), and NLBCDR = 1.000) which have met according to the existing provisions.

Hypothesis

Table 7. Results of hypothesis

Hypothesis	Coefficient (β)	*P-value*	Result
H1: Crowdedness has an significant and positive effect on restaurant image	0,70	<0.001	Accepted
H2: Restaurant Image has an significant and positive effect on brand trust	0,72	<0.001	Accepted
H3: Restaurant Image has an significant and positive effect on brand attachment	0,77	<0.001	Accepted
H4: Brand trust has an significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction	0,56	<0.001	Accepted
H5: Brand attachment has an significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction	0,23	<0.001	Accepted

Source: Data Processed, 2023

The results of this study indicate that human crowding has a positive and significant influence on restaurant image (β = 0.70 and p = < 0.001), Restaurant image has a positive and significant influence on brand trust (β = 0.72 and p = < 0. 001), Restaurant image has a positive and significant effect on

brand attachment (β = 0.77 and p = < 0.001), Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction (β = 0.56 and p = < 0.001). Brand attachment has a positively and significantly effects on customer satisfaction (β = 0.23 and p = < 0.001).

The effect of Crowdedness on Restaurant Image

Based on Table 7, human crowding positively and significantly affects restaurant image. According to previous research Putri et al. (2023), human crowding that occurs in restaurants has a positive effect on restaurant image because the crowd that occurs illustrates the popularity of the place and a positive image in the minds of consumers. Likewise, when a restaurant is quiet, consumers associate it with low food quality, high prices, and a poor restaurant image (Tse et al., 2002). Crowdedness can be measured by the number of consumers in the restaurant, the busy condition of the restaurant, and the condition of the restaurant where there is always a queue. The more crowded and dense a restaurant is, the more consumers will assume that the restaurant has good food taste and has a low price.

The effect of Restaurant Image on Brand Trust

Furthermore, restaurant image has a positive and significant influence on brand trust. As in research Chinomona, 2016; Liu & Ma (2019) also shows that brand image has a contribution to increasing brand trust. According Bernarto et al. (2020) when a product has a good image, consumer confidence will increase that the product has good quality as well. Consumers will trust restaurants that have a good image or reputation more than restaurants that have a bad reputation. Without a positive brand image, it is very difficult for a company to attract new customers and retain existing ones.

The spicy noodle restaurant has a contemporary interior design. The average consumer is teenagers, namely students and college students, who prefer contemporary and aesthetic restaurants. This restaurant also offers a variety of unique and exciting menus but at a low price. Considering that the target market of this restaurant is students, the price indicator on the restaurant image variable also has a significant influence. This is proven by the factor loading value on the price indicator which has the largest value, namely 0.859. Both indicators, namely interior design and price, have the largest loading value, so it can be interpreted that these two indicators have the greatest contribution to improving the restaurant's image.

The effect of Restaurant Image on Brand Attachment

It was found that brand image also positively and significantly influences brand attachment. Research Pangemanan et al. (2020) also shows that brand image increases brand attachment, consumers will compare several brands before choosing the right product, and the usual way consumers use it is to compare the brand image. When a restaurant has a better image than competing restaurants, consumers tend to choose to visit the restaurant. Thus, the better the image a restaurant has, the more it can increase consumer attachment to a brand. Consumers think that the price given by this spicy noodle restaurant is cheaper than that of other restaurants. The positive image of the restaurant is embedded in consumers and can make them continue to choose this restaurant when they want to enjoy spicy noodle dishes.

The effect of Brand Trust on Customer Satisfaction

Based on the research results, brand trust positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction. Research Ihsan & Sutedjo, 2022; Wardani et al. (2023) also shows that brand trust increases customer satisfaction. According to Susilowati (2010), the more consumers believe in a particular brand (brand trust), the more satisfied consumers are with that brand (Kundu & Datta, 2015) Also, customer trust is an essential factor contributing to service quality and customer satisfaction.

In line with research Firmansyah (2019), the fulfillment of consumer expectations and the fulfillment of brand promises that have been given can ultimately create customer satisfaction. Since its inception, this restaurant has made promises through social media and websites that it will carry the concept of modern dining at affordable prices. This restaurant can keep the promise, where the restaurant has a modern building design and sells its products at affordable prices. With the fulfillment of consumer expectations, it can increase consumer confidence and satisfaction.

The effect of Brand Attachment on Customer Satisfaction

Brand attachment also has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. Research Nian et al. (2023) shows that consumers' strong attachment to a brand is one of the drivers of customer satisfaction. Research Rakhmawati & Tuti (2023) also found that brand attachment positively and significantly affects customer satisfaction. Brand attachment involves cognitive (thoughts) and emotional (emotional) decisions to attach themselves to a brand, obtained through consumer experiences. Consumers' Positive experiences with a brand can cause warm feelings and evoke various positive emotions such as pleasure, love, warm feelings, or passion towards the brand (Fonny & Nova Tandijaya, 2022). Therefore, a restaurant must create a positive experience for consumers so that it can increase attachment and can increase customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Based on the PLS-SEM analysis conducted in this study, the results show that human crowding positively and significantly influences restaurant image. The more crowded a restaurant is, the better the image because consumers associate crowds with prices, food quality, and good service. Then, restaurant image has a positive and significant influence on brand trust and brand attachment. A good restaurant image can increase consumer trust and attachment to a restaurant. Furthermore, brand trust and brand attachment have a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction. Therefore, restaurants must think of strategies to improve a good image in the minds of consumers so that it will lead to satisfaction. In addition, restaurants must also improve the services provided to consumers. So that even though the restaurant is crowded with visitors, the service is still responsive and friendly. For further research, it is hoped that it can explore other variables that affect restaurant image, as discussed in this study, so that restaurants can determine the right marketing strategy for increasing customer satisfaction.

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