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Transforming Local Culinary Resources into Competitive Value: A Critical Conceptual Review of Local Menu Competitiveness in Hospitality

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ABSTRACT: The growing strategic role of local cuisine in hospitality requires an understanding of competitiveness that extends beyond food attributes alone. Although existing research has extensively examined Food Quality, Authenticity, Service Quality, Customer Experience, and Customer Loyalty, these perspectives remain conceptually fragmented in explaining how local culinary resources acquire competitive significance from the customer's perspective. This critical literature review aims to integrate these perspectives and develop a coherent conceptual explanation of the transformation of local culinary resources into customer-perceived competitive value. The review employed a Critical/Conceptual Literature Review approach based on purposive and concept-driven literature identification, critical analysis, thematic synthesis, and conceptual integration. The synthesis indicates that Food Quality, Authenticity, and Service Quality represent complementary sources of culinary value whose strategic significance is realized through their integration within Customer Experience. Customer Experience functions as the central value-transformation process, while Customer Loyalty represents the continuity of experienced value within customer relationships. Building on this synthesis, the review develops the Value Transformation Perspective, through which Local Menu Competitiveness is conceptually expressed in Value Superiority, Differentiation Advantage, Market Preference, and Competitive Sustainability. These manifestations are conceptual expressions rather than predetermined empirical dimensions. The synthesis further proposes experiential-relational competitiveness of local menus as its principal conceptual implication, reframing local-menu competitiveness as customer-oriented strategic value shaped through experience and relational continuity. The proposed perspective is interpretive rather than deterministic and provides a conceptual basis for future empirical validation across diverse hospitality settings, customer segments, and local culinary contexts.

KEYWORDS: Local Menu Competitiveness; Food Quality; Authenticity; Service Quality; Customer Experience; Customer Loyalty.

I. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry has increasingly shifted from a predominantly service-based orientation toward an experience-based economy, changing the basis of value creation from the fulfillment of functional needs to the ability of hospitality providers to orchestrate meaningful, memorable, and contextually relevant experiences. This transformation has repositioned food and beverage from a supporting function of accommodation into an increasingly strategic component of the hospitality experience. Food is no longer evaluated solely according to its functional attributes but also according to the sensory, emotional, cultural, and relational meanings attached to its consumption. Within this changing competitive landscape, local cuisine offers a distinctive opportunity because its value may derive from the combination of product quality, cultural identity, authenticity, service interaction, and the experience created around consumption. From a Resource-Based View (RBV), such resources may constitute a basis for competitive advantage when they are valuable, distinctive, and difficult for competitors to replicate, particularly when competitive value extends beyond the physical product to the cultural and experiential resources surrounding it (Barney, 1995; Barney et al., 2023; Porter, 1997).

The growing importance of culinary experience is closely associated with changing tourist and consumer expectations. Local food increasingly forms part of the motivation for experiencing a destination rather than merely satisfying physiological needs. Bagaihing and Mantolas (2021), for example, highlight the importance of local culinary experiences in destination-related travel decisions. This development suggests that local cuisine can function as an experiential resource through which destinations and hospitality businesses communicate identity and create differentiation. Experiential marketing and Customer Experience perspectives further indicate that consumption experiences emerge through the integration of sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational responses rather than through isolated evaluations of individual attributes (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009; Ou et al., 2017). In hospitality settings, therefore, the significance of local food cannot be adequately understood

merely from its availability or its compliance with conventional quality standards. Attention must also be directed toward how culinary attributes, cultural meaning, service encounters, and consumption contexts are interpreted by customers.

This issue is particularly important for local-menu competitiveness. The presence of a local dish on a hotel menu does not automatically constitute competitive differentiation. A local offering may possess cultural characteristics and technical quality while remaining commercially weak when customers do not perceive those characteristics as relevant, attractive, meaningful, or valuable. The competitive challenge therefore extends beyond whether hospitality businesses provide local food to whether the distinctive characteristics of that food are recognized and valued within the customer experience.

The Indonesian hospitality context provides a particularly relevant setting for this discussion because the country's culinary diversity creates substantial opportunities to connect hotel offerings with destination identity. Local dishes such as Bandeng Presto, Gudeg, and other regional specialties can provide a direct connection between hotel consumption and the cultural character of a destination. Nevertheless, the practical literature identifies persistent challenges involving limited local-menu variety, customer acceptance of traditional food, the dominance of international menus, limited innovation in presentation, insufficient cultural storytelling competence, and inconsistent taste resulting from inadequate recipe standardization (Hendrayana, 2018; Ariani & Aryanti, 2021; Firmansyah et al., 2025; Mau et al., 2024). Such conditions indicate that the strategic potential of local cuisine depends not only on the existence of culinary resources but also on their relevance to customers and their integration within the hospitality offering. Local wisdom may consequently remain a supplementary offering when it is not connected to a broader hospitality value-creation strategy (Dinihayati et al., 2024).

Existing literature provides substantial knowledge concerning the individual components involved in local culinary value creation. Food Quality research has examined sensory, aesthetic, functional, and health-related evaluations; Authenticity research has emphasized cultural legitimacy, perceived genuineness, identity, and meaningfulness; Service Quality research has addressed reliability, responsiveness, interaction, and the service environment; Customer Experience research has examined holistic sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational responses; and Customer Loyalty research has considered the continuation of customer relationships through behavioral, attitudinal, and advocacy responses (Majid et al., 2018; Prayag et al., 2022; Jeaheng et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2009; Naini et al., 2022). Recent studies further demonstrate the continuing relevance of these perspectives across hospitality, tourism, culinary experience, authenticity, service quality, and customer loyalty (Ling et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2023; Cankül et al., 2024; Croitoru et al., 2024; Purnami & Nurcaya, 2025; Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026).

However, these literature streams have largely developed around different analytical concerns. Food Quality emphasizes the value of the culinary product; Authenticity emphasizes cultural and symbolic meaning; Service Quality emphasizes the conditions and interactions surrounding service delivery; Customer Experience emphasizes customers' holistic interpretation of consumption; and Customer Loyalty emphasizes the continuation of customer relationships. Each perspective explains an important aspect of local culinary value, but their combined implications for the competitive significance of local menus remain insufficiently integrated. The unresolved issue is therefore not simply the absence of research on these concepts, but the limited conceptual integration of how different forms of culinary value can be understood collectively from the customer's perspective.

This gap is particularly relevant because competitive advantage in local cuisine cannot be adequately understood as an objective characteristic inherent in a dish. Competitive strategy emphasizes value creation and differentiation, while RBV highlights the strategic importance of valuable and difficult-to-replicate resources (Porter, 1997; Barney, 1995; Barney et al., 2023). In local culinary contexts, cultural identity, authenticity, culinary knowledge, local resources, service capabilities, and experiential capabilities may possess strategic relevance when customers recognize them as meaningful and distinctive. The resulting conceptual challenge is to clarify how these different forms of value can be considered together in explaining the competitive significance of local menus without reducing the explanation to any single culinary or service attribute.

Against this background, this critical literature review aims to interpretively synthesize fragmented hospitality and tourism literature concerning Food Quality, Authenticity, Service Quality, Customer Experience, Customer Loyalty, and Local Menu Competitiveness. The review does not seek to establish or test causal relationships among predefined variables. Instead, it critically examines the complementary explanatory roles of these perspectives and identifies the conceptual connections through which functional, cultural, interactional, experiential, and relational forms of value can be understood across the customer journey. The ultimate objective is to develop a theoretically coherent explanation of how local culinary resources can acquire customer-perceived strategic significance within hospitality.

The review therefore addresses the following central question: How can existing hospitality and tourism literature be conceptually integrated to explain the transformation of local culinary resources into customer-perceived competitive value? Addressing this question provides a basis for reconsidering local cuisine not merely as an additional menu category, but as a potentially strategic hospitality resource whose competitive significance depends on the ways in which culinary, cultural, service, experiential, and relational value are connected.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Food Quality as a Foundation of Culinary Value

Food Quality represents a fundamental component of culinary value because customers initially encounter a local menu through the characteristics of the food itself. Conventional approaches emphasize sensory properties such as taste, aroma, texture, freshness, temperature, and presentation. Contemporary hospitality and tourism literature, however, indicates that customers evaluate food through broader forms of consumption value. Consumption Value Theory recognizes functional, emotional, and epistemic dimensions in consumer evaluation, while the Experience Economy perspective emphasizes the sensory, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of consumption (Liu & Tse, 2018; Liu et al., 2019; Kukanja et al., 2017).

Food Quality can consequently be understood across several interconnected domains. Sensory-hedonic quality concerns taste, aroma, texture, freshness, and the pleasure derived from consumption. Aesthetic-symbolic quality concerns visual presentation and the meanings communicated through the appearance of food. Functional-utilitarian value concerns portion, variety, price, and value for money. Health-related value concerns perceptions of nutritional benefits and well-being (Zhang et al., 2019; Majid et al., 2018; Brewer & Sebby, 2021; Kim et al., 2013; Faulkner et al., 2014). Recent evidence continues to demonstrate the relevance of Food Quality to customer evaluations in hospitality and culinary settings (Ling et al., 2024).

The literature therefore positions Food Quality as an important foundation of culinary value and customer acceptance. At the same time, quality should not be treated as synonymous with competitive distinctiveness. Taste, presentation, portion, freshness, and other technical attributes can potentially be reproduced by competing establishments. Food Quality consequently remains essential to the value of a local menu, while differentiation may also depend on characteristics that connect the culinary offering with place, identity, and customer interpretation.

B. Authenticity as Cultural and Symbolic Value

Authenticity introduces a form of culinary value that is closely connected to place, identity, tradition, and cultural meaning. Contemporary authenticity literature has moved beyond a strictly objective understanding toward a multidimensional perspective encompassing objective-cultural, constructive or perceived, and existential forms of authenticity (Zhang et al., 2019; Prayag et al., 2022; Hsu et al., 2021; Eck et al., 2026).

Objective-cultural authenticity concerns the relationship between a culinary offering and its traditional recipes, ingredients, preparation methods, cultural representation, and continuity of identity. Constructed or perceived authenticity concerns whether customers recognize an offering as genuine, original, credible, and appropriately representative of a particular place or culture. Existential authenticity refers to emotional engagement, self-connection, and the personal meaningfulness generated through consumption. These perspectives demonstrate that authenticity is simultaneously related to the culinary product, cultural representation, and individual experience.

The interpretive nature of authenticity is particularly important for local cuisine. Cultural identity cannot simply be placed on a menu and assumed to generate value. Customers must be able to recognize and interpret the cultural significance represented by the offering. Cultural storytelling can therefore function as a reinforcing mechanism through which the origins of a dish, local ingredients, preparation traditions, cultural values, and relationships with local communities are communicated (Cheng, 2023; Jantsch et al., 2024; Kaur, 2022). Storytelling is not a separate form of authenticity; rather, it can strengthen the interpretation of authenticity by connecting culinary attributes with cultural meaning. Through such interpretation, food may become associated with identity, memory, place attachment, and experiential value (Prayag et al., 2022; Leksana et al., 2025; Cankül et al., 2024).

The literature also reveals a tension between cultural continuity and contemporary relevance. Excessive emphasis on preserving traditional characteristics may constrain adaptation to contemporary customer preferences, whereas excessive modification may weaken perceptions of cultural legitimacy. Perceived authenticity therefore depends not only on historical fidelity but also on how a dish is presented, explained, served, and experienced in a contemporary hospitality setting (Hsu et al., 2021; Eck et al., 2026; Leksana et al., 2025; Bakr et al., 2025). Authenticity consequently involves a balance between maintaining recognizable cultural identity and remaining meaningful within contemporary consumption contexts.

C. Service Quality as Interactional and Experiential Infrastructure

Service Quality provides the interactional and environmental context within which culinary offerings are encountered. Traditional service-quality research, particularly the SERVQUAL perspective, conceptualizes quality through reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Contemporary service perspectives broaden this understanding by emphasizing interaction, resource integration, and value creation within particular consumption contexts.

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) conceptualizes value as emerging through resource integration, use, and interaction rather than being embedded exclusively in a provider's output (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2020; Nariswari & Vargo, 2024). In hospitality, this perspective suggests that the value of a local culinary product may be influenced by the manner in which employees communicate, respond, personalize service, resolve problems, and create an appropriate physical environment. Service

Quality therefore extends beyond operational delivery and encompasses the conditions through which customers encounter and interpret the culinary offering.

Within hotel restaurants, Service Quality can encompass core service reliability, interaction quality, responsiveness and problem handling, physical and service environment, and assurance. Reliability concerns consistency and accuracy; interaction quality includes friendliness, attention, personalization, and communication; responsiveness concerns the ability to address customer needs and problems; the physical and service environment includes cleanliness, comfort, ambience, spatial arrangement, and employee appearance; while assurance reflects competence, professionalism, knowledge, and the ability to create confidence (Namin, 2017; Gopi & Samat, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2023; Jeaheng et al., 2020).

Recent hospitality research continues to demonstrate the relevance of Service Quality to customer responses and relational outcomes (Gulam et al., 2023; Pandiangan et al., 2024; Soerjanto et al., 2024; Riyadi et al., 2024). In the context of local cuisine, Service Quality is particularly relevant because the communication, presentation, and interpersonal treatment surrounding a dish can influence how its culinary and cultural characteristics are encountered. A culturally distinctive dish may therefore be experienced differently depending on the reliability, responsiveness, communication, and interpersonal quality of the surrounding service.

D. Customer Experience as Holistic Consumption Experience

Customer Experience has developed from a predominantly transactional concept toward a holistic and dynamic perspective encompassing the customer journey (Verhoef et al., 2009). Hospitality experiences emerge through interactions with products, employees, physical environments, social relationships, and cultural contexts (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009). Recent hospitality research similarly positions Customer Experience as an important perspective for understanding customer responses within hospitality encounters (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Kacprzak & Hensel, 2023).

From an SDL perspective, experience also involves customer participation in value creation through the integration of available resources with personal knowledge, expectations, emotions, and social context (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2020). Consequently, the same local menu may be experienced differently by different customers depending on how they perceive its quality, authenticity, presentation, service encounter, cultural relevance, and surrounding atmosphere.

Customer Experience can be understood through interconnected sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions. Sensory experience emerges from taste, aroma, texture, and visual appearance; emotional experience encompasses pleasure, comfort, excitement, and affective responses; cognitive experience involves interpretation, evaluation, expectations, and perceived value; and relational experience connects consumption with identity, lifestyle, social relationships, and cultural meaning (Zhang et al., 2019; Kukanja et al., 2017; Ling et al., 2024; Prayag et al., 2022; Hsu et al., 2021).

The holistic character of Customer Experience is particularly relevant to local cuisine because customers encounter food attributes, cultural meanings, service interactions, and environmental conditions within the same consumption context. Their responses therefore cannot always be understood by examining each element independently. Stimulus–Organism–Response reasoning provides a supporting perspective by suggesting that environmental and consumption stimuli are internally processed before generating behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within hospitality, culinary characteristics, cultural cues, service encounters, and environmental conditions may contribute to customers' experiential evaluations, which can be reflected in satisfaction, emotional attachment, revisit intention, recommendation, willingness to pay, and other post-consumption responses (Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Kacprzak & Hensel, 2023; Croitoru et al., 2024).

The literature therefore positions Customer Experience as a holistic customer-level perspective for understanding how multiple elements of a hospitality encounter are perceived together. Its importance for local cuisine lies in its capacity to account for the fact that culinary quality, cultural meaning, service interaction, and consumption context may acquire significance through their combined interpretation rather than through isolated attributes.

E. Customer Loyalty as Relational Continuity

Customer Loyalty has increasingly moved beyond a narrow behavioral definition based on repeat purchase or revisit toward a multidimensional understanding encompassing behavioral, attitudinal, and advocacy dimensions (Naini et al., 2022; Pekovic & Rolland, 2020; Purnami & Nurcaya, 2025; Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026). Behavioral loyalty concerns repeat consumption and revisitation; attitudinal loyalty reflects preference, attachment, and psychological commitment; while advocacy loyalty is manifested through recommendations and positive word of mouth.

This distinction is important in hospitality because repeat behavior alone does not necessarily indicate strong relational attachment. Customers may return because of convenience, location, price, or limited alternatives, whereas stronger forms of loyalty involve more durable preference and willingness to maintain a relationship with the hospitality provider.

The literature associates perceived value, gastronomic experience, product quality, service quality, and authenticity with customer responses extending beyond immediate satisfaction toward continued patronage and advocacy (Rafdinal & Suhartanto, 2020; Croitoru et al., 2024; Cankül et al., 2024; Majid et al., 2018). Customer Experience and Customer Loyalty nevertheless

represent conceptually different forms of customer response. Experience concerns how customers encounter, feel, evaluate, and interpret an offering, whereas loyalty concerns the continuation of the customer relationship through repeated behavior, preference, commitment, and advocacy (Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Rafdinal & Suhartanto, 2020).

Accordingly, loyalty should not be understood as an automatic consequence of any single positive consumption evaluation. Its relevance to local cuisine lies in the possibility that customer responses may extend beyond an individual encounter toward continued preference, engagement, and advocacy. This distinction provides an important conceptual basis for examining the relationship between immediate culinary experience and longer-term customer relationships.

F. Customer Relevance and Culinary Adaptability

Customer preference provides an important contextual consideration because local cuisine is encountered by customers with heterogeneous expectations, cultural backgrounds, motivations, and consumption preferences. Preference toward local food is not determined exclusively by taste but may also involve cognitive, affective, demographic, cultural, and psychographic considerations. Customer evaluations may encompass visual presentation, ingredient quality, cultural storytelling, service context, and consumption atmosphere (Anam, 2024; Gunawan et al., 2024).

Such heterogeneity creates a tension between cultural specificity and contemporary relevance. A local menu may preserve recognizable cultural characteristics while requiring adaptation in presentation, communication, service processes, or value proposition to remain attractive to different customer groups (Ahani, 2019; Oktaviana et al., 2024; Baek et al., 2020). The objective is not necessarily to remove cultural specificity but to ensure that distinctive characteristics remain accessible and meaningful within changing consumption contexts.

Culinary innovation can contribute to this adaptability. The Diffusion of Innovations perspective identifies relative advantage, compatibility, and perceived value as important considerations in the adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003). Applied to local culinary offerings, innovation may involve redesigning presentation, communicating cultural meaning, adapting service processes, improving value for money, strengthening local sourcing, or incorporating sustainability while retaining recognizable cultural characteristics. Recent hospitality and culinary research similarly highlights innovation as relevant to the competitiveness and sustainability of local food offerings (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Mau et al., 2024).

Thus, innovation is best understood here as a supporting contextual consideration rather than as a separate core component of local culinary value. Its significance lies in the ability to maintain the relevance of culturally distinctive offerings without necessarily compromising their recognizable identity.

G. Local Menu Competitiveness

Local Menu Competitiveness refers to the competitive significance of a local culinary offering in relation to available alternatives. It is more appropriately understood as a customer-based form of competitive advantage than as an objective characteristic inherent in a dish. Competitive strategy emphasizes value creation and differentiation as fundamental sources of competitive advantage, while RBV emphasizes the strategic significance of resources that are valuable and difficult to replicate (Porter, 1997; Barney, 1995; Barney et al., 2023).

In the culinary sector, competitiveness may be influenced by quality, innovation, market conditions, and consumer response (Hamulczuk & Pawlak, 2022; Abdumuminov, 2021). Local identity and authenticity may provide additional differentiation when customers recognize them as meaningful and distinctive (Shahrin et al., 2025; Eck et al., 2026). Recent work on food and culinary competitiveness likewise emphasizes differentiation, innovation, sustainability, and market relevance (Fathiyah & Nuvriasari, 2024; Seo & Lee, 2025; Shahrin et al., 2025).

From this perspective, the competitive significance of a local menu cannot be inferred solely from the existence of cultural characteristics or technical product quality. It must be considered in relation to the value customers perceive, the distinctiveness they recognize, the preferences they develop, and the continued relevance of the offering in relation to alternatives. These considerations establish the conceptual boundaries of Local Menu Competitiveness without presupposing a fixed set of empirical dimensions.

H. Theoretical Foundations and Complementary Perspectives

Three theoretical perspectives provide the principal foundation for interpreting the literature on local culinary value. Service-Dominant Logic provides the value-creation perspective by emphasizing resource integration, use, and interaction. Customer Experience and Experience Economy perspectives provide the experiential perspective by emphasizing holistic sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational engagement across the consumption context. Resource-Based View provides the strategic perspective by explaining why valuable, distinctive, and difficult-to-replicate culinary, cultural, and organizational resources may acquire competitive significance (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2009; Barney, 1995; Barney et al., 2023).

These perspectives are complementary rather than competing theoretical explanations. SDL directs attention to how value is created through resource integration; Customer Experience/Experience Economy directs attention to how that value is encountered and interpreted by customers; and RBV directs attention to the strategic relevance of resources within competitive contexts. Stimulus–Organism–Response reasoning and Diffusion of Innovations provide supporting insights into customer processing and culinary adaptability, respectively (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Rogers, 2003).

Taken together, these perspectives provide complementary foundations for examining local culinary value. They clarify the nature of culinary resources, the experiential context in which customers encounter them, and the strategic significance that may emerge from customer recognition. However, they do not by themselves constitute a single integrated explanation of how these forms of value are connected across the customer journey. The critical synthesis and conceptual integration of these connections are therefore developed in the Results and Discussion section.

III. METHODOLOGY

I. Research Approach

This study employs a Critical/Conceptual Literature Review approach. This approach is used to identify, evaluate, compare, and synthesize the literature in order to develop a more coherent conceptual understanding of a phenomenon (Snyder, 2019). Unlike a systematic review, which is oriented toward the comprehensive and protocol-based search and synthesis of evidence, a critical review emphasizes critical analysis, synthesis, and the development of conceptual understanding (Grant & Booth, 2009).

This approach also follows the principles of an integrative literature review, which integrates various bodies of thought and research findings to generate a broader conceptual interpretation (Torraco, 2005).

J. Literature Identification and Selection

The literature was identified purposively and concept-driven, based on its direct relevance to the focus of the review. Literature identification was directed toward the key concepts that constitute the focus of the analysis, namely food quality, authenticity, service quality, customer experience, customer loyalty, and local menu competitiveness. The subsequent selection of sources considered conceptual relevance, theoretical contribution, academic quality, and relevance to the analytical focus.

The literature includes foundational scholarly works to establish the conceptual foundation, as well as more recent peer-reviewed studies to enrich, develop, and critically examine existing understanding. Literature was retained when it made a clear contribution to conceptual understanding, the development of theoretical perspectives, relevant findings, or critical interpretations of the issues under review. Sources lacking substantive relevance to the focus of the review were excluded from the synthesis. Accordingly, literature selection prioritized relevance and conceptual contribution to the objectives of the review, consistent with the characteristics of a critical and integrative review (Grant & Booth, 2009; Torraco, 2005).

K. Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted through three main stages:

1. *Critical Analysis*
   The literature was critically analyzed to identify key concepts, assumptions, similarities, differences, interrelationships, and limitations in the arguments developed in previous research (Grant & Booth, 2009).
2. *Thematic Synthesis*
   Conceptual findings from different sources were grouped according to themes with substantive relevance. The synthesis was conducted thematically to identify patterns, convergences, differences, and relationships among ideas, rather than presenting the literature on an article-by-article basis (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005).
3. *Conceptual Integration*
   The identified themes were subsequently integrated through critical comparison and theoretical interpretation to produce a coherent conceptual understanding. This process enabled relevant perspectives to be reorganized into an integrated conceptual synthesis (Torraco, 2005).

L. Rigor and Transparency

The rigor of the review was maintained through transparency in literature selection, consistency in analysis, traceability between the literature and the synthesis, and coherence in conceptual integration. The key concepts used in the review were grounded in relevant literature and assessed based on their contribution to the conceptual argument. The analysis also considered the alignment, differences, and limitations of perspectives identified in the literature so that the synthesis did not remain at the level of descriptive summary (Snyder, 2019; Grant & Booth, 2009).

M. Conceptual Synthesis

The analysis resulted in a conceptual synthesis following the sequence:

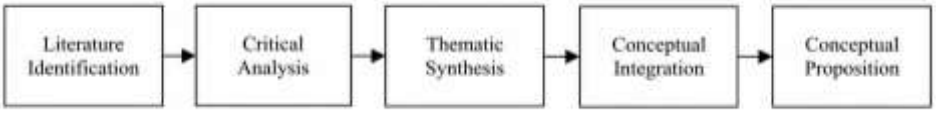

Figure 1. Analytical Process of the Critical/Conceptual Literature Review

The resulting conceptual framework represents an interpretation and synthesis of the literature, rather than a causal relationship model empirically tested.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Critical Synthesis of the Literature

The critical synthesis indicates that local menu competitiveness in the hospitality context cannot be explained solely through the superiority of food attributes. Recent literature shows that gastronomic value is formed through the interconnectedness of product quality, cultural authenticity, service quality, consumption experience, and customer relationships. Studies on food quality demonstrate its association with customer satisfaction and responses, while research on gastronomic experiences indicates that consumption value develops through a combination of experience, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty (Ling et al., 2024; Cankül et al., 2024; Rahmayoga & Wiwoho, 2025). However, the literature also indicates that these elements do not perform identical functions. The value of a menu is not determined solely by the presence of superior attributes, but by how product attributes, cultural meaning, and service interactions are integrated within the consumption experience. Accordingly, a local menu needs to be understood not merely as a food product, but as part of a value-creation system involving customers, service, the consumption environment, and cultural context.

The synthesis indicates that these elements have different but complementary value-creation functions. Food Quality provides the foundation of product value through taste, freshness, ingredient quality, and presentation quality. Recent research demonstrates that food quality remains relevant to customer evaluations and responses, but its strategic strength does not always operate independently and may depend on the value and experience accompanying consumption (Ling et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2023; Rahmayoga & Wiwoho, 2025). Therefore, Food Quality is more appropriately understood as a product-value foundation that provides value potential. This position does not diminish the importance of food quality but places it proportionately within the value-creation process: quality provides the basis for acceptance and the formation of product value, while competitive differentiation requires a broader configuration of value.

Authenticity serves a different function because it provides cultural and symbolic content that enables local menus to represent the identity, traditions, history, and character of a place. Recent research indicates that food authenticity is associated with perceived value, purchase intention, authentic experience, and customer loyalty (Shin et al., 2026). Research on gastronomic experiences also indicates that the value of authenticity becomes more meaningful when customers can connect food with cultural meanings and personally relevant experiences (Cankül et al., 2024; Belly et al., 2024). Thus, authenticity should not be understood merely as the presence of traditional elements in a menu. Its value depends on how cultural identity is recognized, interpreted, and presented in a manner that is relevant to the consumption experience. This involves an important conceptual tension: the stronger the effort to preserve local identity, the more important it becomes for hospitality to translate that identity into a form of experience that customers can understand without losing its cultural meaning.

Meanwhile, Service Quality provides the relational dimension of value creation. Recent literature indicates that service quality is associated with satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty in restaurant and hotel contexts (Ahmed et al., 2023; Gulam et al., 2023; Pandiangan et al., 2024; Soerjanto et al., 2024). In hotel restaurant contexts, service quality is not limited to the accuracy of service delivery but also encompasses interaction, responsiveness, environmental comfort, and staff members' ability to create a convincing experience. This indicates that service is not merely a complement to the food product. Rather, service provides the interactional context through which product quality and cultural meaning can be received, interpreted, and experienced by customers more fully.

Accordingly, the literature reveals a consistent pattern while also establishing limitations on approaches that focus excessively on a single attribute. Food Quality primarily provides product value, Authenticity enriches cultural and symbolic value, while Service Quality provides the context for interaction. Conceptually, none of these three elements alone is sufficient to explain the entire process through which local menu competitiveness is formed. The limitations of an attribute-based approach create the need to explain how different value resources are transformed into customer experience and subsequently sustained within customer relationships.

B. Customer Experience as the Central Value-Transformation Process

The synthesis of the literature positions Customer Experience as the central value-transformation process. Literature on customer experience in hospitality indicates that experience is multidimensional, dynamic, subjective, and develops throughout the customer journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Kacprzak & Hensel, 2023; Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023). In the gastronomic context, experience is also associated with restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, indicating that food consumption cannot be separated from the overall experience surrounding it (Cankül et al., 2024).

This central position is important because the literature on Food Quality, Authenticity, and Service Quality essentially addresses different sources of value, whereas the Customer Experience literature explains how these sources come together within a single consumption process experienced by customers. Developments in customer experience research in the hotel industry further reinforce the position of experience as a space in which multiple touchpoints, social interactions, the service environment, and customer engagement are integrated (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Kacprzak & Hensel, 2023). Therefore, Food Quality, Authenticity, and Service Quality do not need to be viewed as independent sources of value. Food Quality provides product quality, Authenticity provides cultural meaning, while Service Quality provides the context for interaction. Their strategic value develops when customers integrate these elements into a coherent gastronomic experience.

This perspective also helps explain why good product quality is not always identical to the strongest experience. Recent research indicates that gastronomic experiences can shape perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty through a broader configuration of experience than food attributes alone (Cankül et al., 2024; Belly et al., 2024). In the hotel context, customer experience is also influenced by interactions with staff, atmosphere, the service environment, and the overall customer journey (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023). Thus, the issue is not to contrast product quality with experience, but to understand that product quality acquires different strategic value when situated within a broader experience. Customer Experience becomes the conceptual space in which product attributes, cultural content, and interaction quality acquire broader meaning for customers.

From the perspective of Service-Dominant Logic, this process can be understood as the integration of resources within value-in-use. Developments in SDL increasingly emphasize human-centered value creation, relationships, interactions, and context of use (Vargo et al., 2020; Nariswari & Vargo, 2024). Accordingly, Customer Experience is more appropriately understood as a value-transformation process rather than merely an evaluation of a product or service. Experience represents the point that connects value resources with relational and strategic consequences. In other words, gastronomic resources do not automatically carry their full competitive value; part of that value is formed when customers experience them and assign meaning to the combination of product, culture, service, and consumption context.

C. Customer Loyalty as Value Retention and Relational Continuity

The subsequent synthesis indicates that customer experience acquires relational consequences when the experience is perceived as valuable, relevant, and meaningful. Recent literature shows that Customer Loyalty develops as a multidimensional construct encompassing repeat purchase behavior, preference, attachment, recommendation, and continuity of the customer relationship (Croitoru et al., 2024; Purnami & Nurcaya, 2025; Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026). In the restaurant context, the relationship among perceived value, gastronomic experience, and loyalty increasingly indicates that customers maintain relationships when the value received is perceived as relevant and worth continuing (Croitoru et al., 2024; Cankül et al., 2024).

On this basis, Customer Loyalty can be understood as value retention, referring to the continuity of experiential value within the customer relationship after the consumption episode has taken place. Loyalty does not end with the act of returning but may develop into preference, recommendation, advocacy, and a tendency to maintain the relationship. Recent research on restaurant loyalty also indicates the importance of the combination of value equity, brand equity, and relationship equity in building more sustainable customer relationships (Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026). This understanding extends the meaning of loyalty from an immediate behavioral response to a form of value continuity with a relational dimension.

This perspective indicates that loyalty extends beyond a mere behavioral outcome. Loyalty represents a relational manifestation of experienced value because value experienced by customers is retained through preference, repeat visits, recommendations, and connectedness with the service provider. Purnami and Nurcaya (2025) position loyalty as a strategic issue shaped by various drivers of experience and value, while Hurriyati and Dirgantari (2026) demonstrate the importance of relationship equity in explaining restaurant customer loyalty.

The distinction between experience and loyalty is important in this synthesis. Customer Experience represents the process through which customers experience, interpret, and integrate various sources of value, whereas Customer Loyalty represents the continuity of that value within the customer relationship. Thus, loyalty is not simply a repetition of the same experience but an indication that the value formed through experience has acquired relational relevance. This perspective enables the relationship between experience and competitiveness to be understood through the continuity of customer relationships, rather than through the assumption that every positive experience automatically produces loyalty.

D. From Customer Value to Local Menu Competitiveness

Based on the cross-literature synthesis, local menu competitiveness needs to be understood from the perspective of customer-validated competitiveness. Competitiveness is determined not only by the quality or uniqueness of a menu but also by the extent to which the value offered gains customer acceptance, preference, and sustained support. Recent research on heritage food competitiveness emphasizes the relationship between cultural value, sustainability, and the competitive position of local food (Shahrin et al., 2025). Literature on competitive advantage in culinary businesses also indicates that product and service quality can contribute to competitive advantage, while competitive strength remains related to how these elements are perceived and evaluated in the market (Fathiyah & Nuvriasari, 2024).

Within this framework, loyalty functions as a conceptual link between individual experience and market consequences. Repeat choice, recommendations, preference, and advocacy provide more tangible expressions of customer acceptance. Literature on restaurant loyalty indicates relationships among perceived value, gastronomic experience, and the continuity of customer relationships (Croitoru et al., 2024; Cankül et al., 2024; Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026). Loyalty can therefore be understood as a form of relational value that helps retain the value formed through the consumption experience and extend it into the customer relationship.

The Resource-Based View reinforces the understanding that competitive advantage is not derived solely from physical assets but also from configurations of valuable and difficult-to-replicate resources. Recent discussions of RBV and competitive advantage emphasize the importance of understanding how resources are configured into advantage rather than merely identifying the existence of a resource (Barney et al., 2023). In local gastronomy, cultural identity, interaction quality, contextual experience, and customer relationships can form a more complex value configuration than standalone product attributes.

On the basis of this synthesis, Local Menu Competitiveness can be conceptually formulated through four interrelated manifestations: Value Superiority, Differentiation Advantage, Market Preference, and Competitive Sustainability. These are not dimensions treated as established empirical constructs but rather conceptual manifestations formulated through the integration of the literature. Value Superiority represents the ability of a local menu to offer value perceived as more meaningful or more valuable than available alternatives. Differentiation Advantage refers to the ability to present distinctive characteristics through a combination of quality, cultural identity, service, and experience. Market Preference is reflected in customer acceptance, choice, and tendency to maintain a preference for the menu. Meanwhile, Competitive Sustainability indicates the ability to maintain relevance and competitive value through customer relationships and the sustainable management of gastronomic resources.

These four manifestations demonstrate that competitiveness is not merely a matter of possessing a differentiated product, but the ability to transform that difference into value recognized by customers and capable of being sustained within market relationships. Accordingly, local menu competitiveness can be understood as a strategic consequence of customer-recognized value, rather than as an objective characteristic automatically inherent in a food offering.

E. The Value Transformation Perspective

Based on the critical integration of the literature, this review develops the Value Transformation Perspective as a conceptual synthesis. This perspective explains that gastronomic resources do not automatically constitute competitive advantage. Their value acquires greater strategic significance through processes of meaning-making and continuity within customer experience:

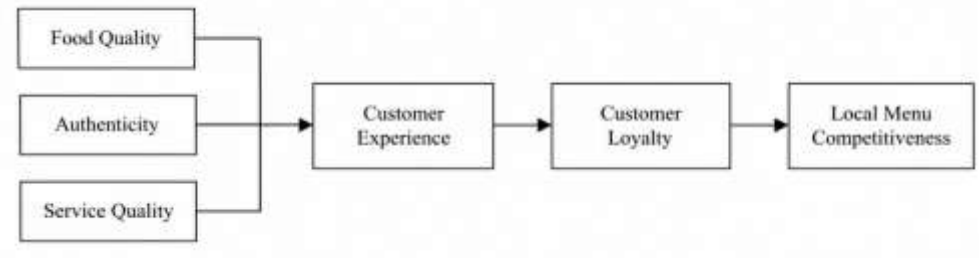

Figure 2. Value Transformation Perspective for Local Menu Competitiveness

This sequence does not imply that each element performs the same function or that the relationships among them necessarily occur in a linear manner. Food Quality provides the product-value foundation; Authenticity provides cultural and symbolic value; while Service Quality provides relational and interactional value. Recent evidence supports this differentiation of functions: food quality is associated with product evaluation and satisfaction (Ling et al., 2024; Rahmayoga & Wiwoho, 2025), authenticity is associated with perceived value and behavioral responses (Shin et al., 2026), while service quality is associated with satisfaction and loyalty in restaurant and hotel contexts (Ahmed et al., 2023; Pandiangan et al., 2024; Soerjanto et al., 2024).

Customer Experience occupies a central position because it represents the process through which customers integrate product, cultural, service, environmental, and interactional resources into a meaningful experience. Studies of gastronomic experiences

indicate that such experiences are associated with restaurant image, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty, positioning experience as a space in which different sources of value are integrated (Cankül et al., 2024). Research on customer experience in hotels also demonstrates the dynamic nature of experience and its development throughout the customer journey (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023).

At this stage, the potential value embedded in local menus acquires a form of experience that is relevant to customers. Subsequently, Customer Loyalty represents the continuity of value through preference, repeat visits, recommendations, advocacy, and customer relationships. Recent literature on restaurant loyalty reinforces the understanding that loyalty is associated with configurations of value, experience, and relationships that develop over time (Croitoru et al., 2024; Purnami & Nurcaya, 2025; Hurriyati & Dirgantari, 2026). Local menu competitiveness can then be understood as a market consequence when this value receives sufficient recognition and support to generate differentiation, preference, and competitive sustainability.

This perspective integrates three main theoretical foundations. Service-Dominant Logic explains value creation through resource integration and value-in-use; the Experience Economy and Customer Experience perspectives provide a foundation for understanding experience as a space for value formation and transformation; while the Resource-Based View explains how configurations of valuable resources can support competitive advantage. Developments in SDL reinforce attention to context, relationships, and human-centered value creation (Vargo et al., 2020; Nariswari & Vargo, 2024), while recent research on customer experience and competitive advantage in hospitality demonstrates the increasing importance of experience in the formation of strategic value (Veloso & Gomez-Suarez, 2023; Barney et al., 2023).

The strength of this perspective lies in its ability to connect bodies of literature that have tended to develop along separate lines. Food Quality research primarily explains product value; authenticity research explains cultural and symbolic value; Service Quality research explains interactional value; Customer Experience research explains the integration of value sources in consumption; loyalty research explains the continuity of customer relationships; while competitive advantage research explains the strategic implications. The Value Transformation Perspective brings these strands together through a single conceptual explanation of how gastronomic resources can acquire strategic value when transformed through experience and sustained within customer relationships.

However, the Value Transformation Perspective is not intended as a deterministic causal model. The sequence represents an interpretive synthesis of the conceptual connections identified in the literature. Relationships among the elements may be contextual, dynamic, and mutually reinforcing, depending on customer characteristics, destination context, service form, and how value is constructed during consumption. Accordingly, the framework serves as a perspective for explaining the process of value transformation rather than as a claim that every local menu will follow an identical pathway.

F. Experiential-Relational Competitiveness of Local Menus

The final synthesis gives rise to the concept of experiential-relational competitiveness, defined here as a conceptual proposition in which the competitive significance of local menus is understood through the strategic role of customer experience and relationship continuity in sustaining competitive value. The concept emerges from the integration of the literature rather than from a previously established construct or category of competitiveness. Gastronomic research indicates that culinary experiences are associated with perceived value, restaurant image, satisfaction, loyalty, and customer behavior (Cankül et al., 2024), while research on local food competitiveness increasingly connects heritage identity, sustainability, and market strength (Shahrin et al., 2025).

This perspective extends local-menu competitiveness beyond product-based differentiation. Food Quality remains an essential foundation of menu acceptance, but its competitive significance is not exhausted by product attributes alone. Similarly, cultural authenticity and service interaction contribute to the distinctiveness of a local offering by shaping how its value is encountered within the hospitality context. Competitive significance therefore depends not only on the attributes a local menu possesses but also on the value customers recognize in experiencing those attributes.

The central implication is that local culinary resources acquire stronger competitive significance when their distinctive value becomes meaningful to customers and remains relevant within customer relationships. In this sense, experiential-relational competitiveness does not constitute a new empirical construct or an additional stage in the value transformation chain. Rather, it characterizes the form of competitiveness that emerges when the strategic significance of local culinary resources is recognized through customer experience and sustained through customer relationships.

Accordingly, experiential-relational competitiveness represents the principal conceptual implication of the synthesis developed in this review. It reframes local-menu competitiveness as a customer-oriented strategic condition, in which culinary resources become competitively meaningful not simply because of their inherent attributes or cultural distinctiveness, but because their value is recognized through experience and sustained within customer relationships. Local gastronomy can consequently be understood not merely as a menu offering, but as a potential source of competitive value grounded in experience and relational continuity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This critical literature review concludes that local menu competitiveness in the hospitality context is better understood as a customer-validated form of strategic value rather than as an inherent property of food quality, cultural distinctiveness, or any individual menu attribute. The critical synthesis shows that the competitive significance of local cuisine depends on the extent to which its distinctive culinary resources become meaningful and valuable from the customer's perspective. This understanding shifts attention from the mere possession of local culinary resources toward their capacity to generate recognized value within hospitality consumption and to remain relevant in relation to available alternatives.

The review contributes the Value Transformation Perspective as an interpretive conceptual synthesis that brings together Service-Dominant Logic, Customer Experience and Experience Economy perspectives, and the Resource-Based View to explain the strategic significance of local culinary resources. Within this perspective, Local Menu Competitiveness is conceptually manifested through Value Superiority, Differentiation Advantage, Market Preference, and Competitive Sustainability. These manifestations provide complementary expressions of customer-validated competitiveness rather than predetermined empirical dimensions, emphasizing that competitive value becomes meaningful when distinctive culinary resources achieve recognition, preference, and continuity within market relationships.

The principal conceptual implication is the proposition of experiential-relational competitiveness of local menus, which extends the understanding of culinary competitiveness beyond product-based differentiation. This perspective positions local cuisine as a potential strategic hospitality resource whose competitive significance is strengthened when distinctive culinary value acquires customer relevance and is sustained through relational continuity. The proposed perspective remains interpretive rather than deterministic, and its conceptual connections may vary according to customer characteristics, destination context, service form, and the context in which value is constructed. Future empirical research should therefore examine and validate the proposed perspective across different hospitality settings, customer segments, and local culinary contexts.

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