**The Influence of Food Values on Satisfaction and Loyalty: Evidence obtained across Restaurant Types**

**Abstract**

To increase our understanding about food choices, their evaluation and their effects on key non-financial variables, we examine potential differences between two types of food values (distinguishing those values that offer added value from those that limits to provide only an offer of basic value) across two types of restaurants regarding their impact their impact on satisfaction with the food, and loyalty to the food and the restaurant. In order to do so, we collected a database of 516 customers of restaurants in Spain and analysed it using descriptive statistics and structural equation analysis. The results evidenced how offering food reflecting both differential added value and basic value increases food satisfaction, and, in turn, customer loyalty to the food and the restaurant. As a novelty in the literature, our findings revealed that basic value offer increases customers’ food satisfaction of both restaurant types but offering food that reflects differential added value offer does not influence customers satisfaction of fast-food restaurants but increases food satisfaction in traditional restaurants. The discussion addresses the key implications of these findings for restaurants strategic positioning.

**Keywords**

*Food values; satisfaction; loyalty; restaurant type.*

**1. Introduction**

 The restaurant industry is one of the most important industries for the Spanish economy, given its contribution to both the Gross Domestic Product (6.2%) and national employment (1.7 million workers) (Hostelería de España, 2022) as well as its importance in terms of the Spanish culture and social activity - it is part of the main customs, traditions and the way of socialising with family, friends and colleagues (Díaz-Méndez and Garcia-Espejo, 2017). It is also a heterogeneous industry, made up of subindustries of a different nature with differences in the goods and services produced and provided, as well as the coexistence of different business models - small, traditional family businesses coexist with large chains with different management styles, franchising, etc. (Gallego, 2018).

 Over recent years, the industry has been evolving due to several aspects from both the demand and the supply sides. From the demand point of view, customers are more informed, and consequently, more demanding about their growing requirements for, among other aspects, health, safety and environmental issues (Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2019). From the supply point of view, the combination of new technologies, modern business management techniques and innovative products have brought about a major transformation in the industry (Gallego, 2018; Alt, 2021). This has made it possible to better adapt to customers’ needs and desires. The need for greater adaptation has been gaining importance for companies’ strategies since operators in the industry have also been increasingly concerned about the importance of reinforcing relations with customers, with gaining consumer loyalty being one of the ultimate goals (Cheema et al., 2020). No doubt that consumer loyalty is a key variable since the Spanish restaurant industry is characterized by a high level of competition (Deloitte 2023), and as a matter of this fact, only in the food franchise industry, for example, sixty five different brands are doing business in more than 7,300 outlets (Spanish Franchise Association 2020). This means that the spending per consumer is distributed across these different brands, which suggests that restaurants wish to maintain their customers base since switching to another restaurant is relatively easy for customers in the industry.

The ability to create a unique experience with a personal signature has become crucial in the highly competitive and dynamically changing restaurant industry, such that being able to offer value based on customised service may define who will stay competitive and profitable. For this reason, to increase customer loyalty, companies have evolved towards different service development strategies, where personalising the relationship through more extensive knowledge of the consumer has acquired greater importance (De Brentani, 2001; Alt, 2021). In order to develop these personalisation strategies, companies have given greater consideration to different types of values, especially because, through such values, companies can create and enhance emotional relationships towards and with consumers (Huang and Chen, 2022).

 Over recent years, a growing amount of research has been devoted to assessing general choice of food taking into account the specific concept of food values (e.g., Connors et al., 2001; Lister et al., 2017; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2019; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2020). This growing interest is highly coherent with the evolution of the marketing discipline, which has sought to reflect the increasing phenomenon of people who prefer to buy from companies that embrace the larger economic, social and political concerns (Kotler, 2011). This increasing consumer preference has led the marketing discipline to evolve from a more product-centric perspective to a more values-focused one, especially since the advent of Marketing 3.0 (Kotler et al., 2019).

 Within this research line, there are several gaps that our paper aims to close. For example, only a few studies on food values have investigated the purchase context, such as the sales channel or the consumption channel, with most of these not assessing differences between restaurant types (e.g., Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2019; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2020). Several economic indicators highlight the importance of the study of differences between formats in the restaurant industry though, such as, for example, the percentage of Spaniards’ total expenditure on food consumption that occurs outside the home, which amounted to 34.1% in 2019, with an average per capita expenditure outside the home of 1,060.29 euros, of which 60.6% went on food and 39.4% on beverages. It is also interesting to note that consumption outside the home that year took place directly in the establishment on 74.1% of occasions, both at lunch and dinner, which were the times of the day where consumption grows the most (Agronoma, 2020). The market share by consumption channel amounted to 41.4% in 2019 for bars/cafeterias/breweries, and 29.0% for restaurants (MAPA, 2020); in addition, people who visited fast food restaurants within the last 30 days in 2019 in Spain amounted to 31% (AIMC, 2022). Therefore, differences in consumption are observed depending on the type of establishment where the food is consumed, which, despite the decreases throughout the pandemic (MAPA, 2020; AIMC, 2022), shows the interest of carrying out research taking into account the differences observed by establishment format.

From an academic outlook, it is important to take into account the place where food is consumed for several reasons. First, by integrating the place of consumption, we increase understanding of food choices, their evaluation and their potential effects on key non-financial variables - both short-and-long term. This, in turn, allows us to respond to the research gap identified concerning the mediating role of satisfaction to predict behavioural outcomes such as loyalty, specifically in service industries such as fast-food restaurants (Walsh and Bartikowski 2013, p. 994). Second, by identifying different appreciations of consumers on food values in different consumption channels, we can enhance consumer insights and provide implications for companies that are at different steps of the supply chain. Taking into account the above ideas, we focus on the restaurant context and examine potential differences among food values between two types of restaurants (traditional vs. fast-food) in terms of their impact on satisfaction with the food, and loyalty (both to the food and the restaurant type). In particular, studies on fast food and customer satisfaction are rare (e.g., Zhong and Moon, 2020) and focus on service aspects (Qin and Prybutok, 2009), and thus our study increases the knowledge about this important industry for many countries.

**2. Theoretical background**

**2.1. Food values and satisfaction**

Over time, it has been observed how people have generally become more sophisticated in terms of their gastronomic preferences, which has resulted, among other things, in their gastronomic expectations also becoming more demanding. As a matter of this, the new generations are increasingly tending to move away from more traditional trends to take more and more into account other types of intangible trends related to innovation and fun, for example (Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2019). This phenomenon enables us to understand, among other growing trends, how people, when visiting a restaurant, also wish to consume food products for a wide range of more differential reasons, such as for example, to support the local community, in order to satisfy their desires for fresh and flavourful food, potential health benefits, and the protection of other environmental issues (Severt et al., 2020).

In this respect, the consideration of food values is a highly useful approach to assess the study of consumers’ decision-making process with regard to food, taking into account that, through this proposal of values, it is possible to investigate consumers' preferences with a stable set of meta-preferences. From this viewpoint, the concept of food values represents a key contribution to the relevant literature since they represent more abstract concepts typically encompassing numerous physical attributes at once, which provide a general view of consumers’ preferences, irrespective of the food product (Lusk and Briggeman, 2009). One of the pioneering proposals on food values was that of Lusk and Briggeman (2009), which inspired several subsequent studies. This work was a cornerstone because it linked personal values to food - that is to say, consumers acquire or consume foods that are consistent with their values as people. Lusk and Briggeman (2009) proposed a scale of values attributable to food, consisting of naturalness, taste, price, safety, convenience, nutrition, tradition, origin, fairness, appearance and environmental impact. This scale of food values has been used by later works, although it has sometimes been modified by different authors.

In general, values act as an important guide in consumers’ lives, determining their consumer behaviour and choices (Rokeach, 1973). The more consistent or coherent the evaluation of the values of a product with the values of an individual, the more favourable the individual’s attitude will be towards that product and the greater will be the chance of their intending to purchase (Vega-Zamora et al., 2020). The evaluation of a product and a perception of a specific level of satisfaction also applies to consuming food. After a meal, consumers will compare the experience with their level of anticipation (Ryu et al., 2012). The quality of food is evaluated based on the taste, freshness, and how the food is being presented to customers, while the perception of a fair or affordable price also has a positive impact on consumer associations (Beristain and Zorrilla, 2011). Further, Namkung and Jang (2007) suggested a complex amalgam of factors, such as physical aspects, composition, nutritional value, processing and storage and safety, which are evaluated by restaurant consumers. These are aspects covered by food values.

As previously mentioned, the more consistent the evaluation of food values with the values of an individual, the more favourable will be the individual’s attitude towards that food offered by the restaurant; such that if the food the restaurant offers is equal to, or better than, what was expected, they will be satisfied with the food. Thus, it is predicted that if the restaurant provides either a differential added value offer (e.g., including values that, for example, support the local community) or a basic value offer (e.g., including values that, for example, are related to the wish for flavourful food), it will positively impact on the food satisfaction of consumers, providing these values are consistent with the individuals’ values. Thus,

# H1a. *Offering food that reflects differential added value increases customers’ food satisfaction.*

# H1b. *Offering food that reflects basic values increases customers’ food satisfaction.*

**2.2. The satisfaction-loyalty relationship for food values**

 Loyalty is a commitment of customers to a particular store, brand and service provider, when there are other alternatives (Shankar et al., 2003). Oliver (1999, p. 34) pointed out that “*loyalty is a deeply held commitment to re-buy and re-patronize a preferred product of service constantly in the future”*. All forms of loyalty (behavioural, attitudinal) are indicative of the gradual accumulation of positive encounters between the manufacturer and the customer (Oliver, 1999; Scheer et al., 2010). Several studies have shown that delivering superior value derived from the complete experience with the service is one of the most important means of generating customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

With loyal customers, restaurants can gain higher profits and lower costs for marketing and promotional activities (Wu, 2011; Uddin, 2019). Consequently, managers and owners of restaurants regard loyal customers as much more valuable than occasional ones (Espinosa et al., 2018). This emphasis on loyal customers is, for example, reflected by loyalty programs that have been introduced by fast-food and traditional restaurants in the past few years (e.g., McDonalds, Wendys). Many studies predict a positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Vesel and Zabkar, 2010). For example, Uddin (2019) found that food quality promotes restaurant loyalty by firstly positively impacting customers’ satisfaction levels. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that food satisfaction also increases loyalty, both towards the restaurant and the food. Accordingly,

H2.*Food satisfaction increases the loyalty of customers towards a restaurant.*

H3. *Food satisfaction increases the food loyalty of customers.*

**2.3. Moderating impact of types of restaurants**

#  Restaurants differ in their offerings of food. Hence, it can be reasoned that the related values firms offer to meet the consumers’ demand also differ. The focus of fast-food restaurants is to serve many customers in a short period, having prepared food and focusing on reasonable prices. Customers value the swift service of fast-food restaurants (e.g., Namin, 2017) and the price of the products (Zhong and Moon, 2020). These aspects relate to basic values for customers. On the other hand, traditional restaurants adopt a different approach by integrating local agricultural producers, thereby supporting the local environment, the income of local employees, and other relevant issues such as health and the environment (Dagevos and Van Ophem, 2013; Lister et al., 2017; Piester et al., 2020). Consequently, the management focus of traditional restaurants often revolves around offering differential added values. Building upon this reasoning, we propose the following:

H4a*. Offering food that reflects differential added value will be less positively related to food satisfaction among customers of fast-food restaurants compared to customers of traditional restaurants.*

H4b*. Offering food that reflects basic values will be more positively related to food satisfaction among customers of fast-food restaurants compared to customers of traditional restaurants.*

**Figure 1**

# 3. Material and Methods

## **3.1. Sample and data collection**

 From March 2019 to April 2019, we conducted a survey of customers at the exit of different restaurants, including traditional and fast-food restaurants located in the city of Albacete (Spain). Albacete has a population of 173,329, of which 142,526 are aged 18 years or over (INE, 2020), which makes it an average size city in Spain. We considered fast food restaurants to be establishments with a high level of recognition among end consumers. For this reason, we selected chains that operate at an international level, being those that can make the greatest investments in communication tools. Diverse reasons motivate this choice. First, we needed to select a similar number of consumers in each subgroup, defined according to the relevant variables of age and establishment format. Thus, we needed high customer traffic in each of the establishments. Secondly, given that Spain is one of the countries with very low spending in fast food restaurants, given the preference for healthy food (Romero and Biswas, 2016), it is especially important to identify those food values that are considered by consumers to increase their satisfaction and maintain their loyalty in this industry. This gives us the opportunity to analyse whether healthy food (part of the differential added value offer) might have an influence on customer satisfaction and could therefore be promoted by restaurants in their marketing communication. Due to the high brand awareness, consumers have no doubts about the typical characteristics of this type of establishment: staff at the counter in charge of the reception and delivery of orders, but lack of table service. These establishments belong to the fast-food chains that were operating in Albacete at that time, namely McDonalds, Burger King, Telepizza and Domino's Pizza.

Regarding traditional restaurants, we only selected those with the highest prestige located in the town centre, being the ones that have been operating in the city for the longest time. We excluded, for example, those located on the outskirts or in suburban areas. This ensured the possibility of having establishments of a certain level of prestige with a high number of customers which helped us to ensure a representative number of sample units from each population subgroup. We considered traditional restaurants to be those where table service predominates, offering a very varied menu and with a certain tendency to include local dishes.

 We performed a quota sampling because this type of non-probability sampling method has been increasingly been used in commercial, marketing and social research in general (Ochoa and Porcar, 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2018), in which we divided the population into subgroups according to the key variables of age and establishment format, seeking to ensure the presence of elements of each subgroup in the final sample. Trained interviewers approached customers at the exit of a large variety of different restaurants located in the city and asked questions aimed at measuring the variables in our proposed research model. Individuals were selected upon leaving the restaurant if, considering that establishment format, they met the expected age profile. No incentive was provided to the consumers for completing the questionnaire. The data were collected by mobile electronic means -mainly tablets and mobile phones. Most of the clients consulted responded to the questionnaire, although some claimed they were in a hurry and so could not complete it (some even refused to do so from the beginning for that very reason, in total 12 people). Finally, 516 completed questionnaires were obtained for our analysis out of the 528 customers initially contacted, representing a response rate of 97.72% (345 from traditional restaurants and 171 from fast food restaurants, see Table 1).

**Table 1**

In terms of demographics, Table 2 shows that 56.2% of the respondents were male, more than 30% of respondents were aged between 26 and 65 years; the majority of respondents were no older than 25 (57.6%). Additionally, most of the respondents had no university studies (59.1%) and had a monthly income of between 900 and 2,100 euros (45.9%). Interestingly, for the fast-food customers, the monthly income, age and level of education were lower than 900 euros (51.5%), lower than 25 years (80.1%) and mostly non-university-based (67.8%), respectively. For the customers of traditional restaurants, however, the monthly income was typically above 900 euros (71.6% of respondents), the age was higher than 25 years (53.6%) and the level of education was practically half university (45.2%), and half non-university based (54.8%).

**Table 2**

**3.2. Measures**

The scales all used 5-point Likert response formats. All constructs were measured using multiple items from previous studies (5-point Likert scales, 1=‘strongly disagree’, 5=‘strongly agree’), which we slightly modified (for a detailed description of the items, see Table 3). This slight adaptation was the result of, first, the use of a Brislin's (1980) back-translation procedure and, second, the input received from the organisation of 2 focus groups with 4 experts in consumer behaviour research and 3 regular consumers of each of the types of restaurants in which the study focused, either fast-food or traditional restaurants. Thus, in the first place, the scales, which were originally in English, were translated by a bilingual professional from English into Spanish and then translated back into English by another professional to ensure semantic equivalence between both translations. Next, the 2 focus groups (each involving 2 experts and 3 consumers) shared their opinions regarding the clarity, readability and cultural suitability of these items to the Spanish context. No significant problems emerged, and only minor adaptations to the language were carried out to accurately capture the aspects studied in the current research.

Satisfaction with the food consumed in the restaurant was measured using four items adapted from Fornell (1992) and Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2019). For example, the item in this construct “The food consumed met my expectations”, is adapted from the component of satisfaction highlighted by Fornell (1992) as capturing confirmation of expectations, and the item “The food met my expectations” included in the construct “Satisfaction with the food” was used by Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2019).

Loyalty to the restaurant was measured using three items adapted from Kamran-Disfani et al. (2017) and Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2019). For example, the item “I do most of my food consumption at this establishment” was adapted from the item “I carry out the majority of my purchases at this establishment” by Kamran-Disfani et al. (2017) and the item “Meals outside the home are consumed at this establishment” is within the loyalty construct used by Izquierdo-Yusta et al. (2020).

In measuring loyalty to the food, two items were adapted from Kamran-Disfani et al. (2017). For example, the item “Whenever I can I recommend these foods” was adapted from “Whenever I can, I recommend this establishment” within construct of attitudinal loyalty.

For building the differential added value offer, the food values used were nutrition, tradition, origin, naturalness, environmental impact and for building food values that form the basic value offer, we used food values of appearance, taste, price, convenience and safety. These last two variables were built formatively, given that their respective items determine each one of the constructs and are not necessarily intercorrelated (Hair et al., 2017, Ringle et al., 2022).

**Table 3**

We used four control variables (gender, age, monthly income, educational level), which have been used in previous research as antecedents of customer loyalty (Hansen and Slogaard, 2004) to show that our hypothesised links to loyalty variables (our main and final dependent variables, food and restaurant loyalty) have explanatory power beyond those control variables. However, a comparison of the results of three statistical analyses—one including all the control variables, another including only the control variables that relate to our dependent variable, and a third with no control variables—revealed almost identical parameters, with unchanged significance levels. Thus, in line with Bernerth and Aguinis (2016), we included no controls in our empirical analysis.

Because our research design was cross-sectional and used self-reported measures, common method bias and social desirability bias represented potential concerns. Accordingly, we designed the questionnaire emphasising there were no right or wrong answers and that honest responses were appreciated, to reduce social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We also used remedies to mitigate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), such as ensuring both physical and psychological separation between the predictors and criterion variables in the questionnaire, using various variables that serve as distracters, and using simple, specific, and concise items to keep the questionnaire short. Finally, the exploratory factor analysis of all the variables in our model did not result in a single factor (up to six factors emerged) and the first factor did not account for the majority of covariance between variables (only 29%, far less than half of the total variance), thus implying that common method variance is not a serious concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

## **3.3. Data analysis**

To test our hypotheses, we relied on partial least squares (PLS), using Smart PLS 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2022). This powerful, robust statistical procedure is a fully-fledged structural equation modelling approach that allows for the inclusion of both reflective and formative measures in the same analysis (both types of measures are included in this study as earlier noted) and does not require demanding assumptions about the distribution of the variables (Hair et al., 2017). As recommended (Hair et al., 2017), our PLS statistical analysis used 5,000 subsamples to generate standard errors and bootstrap t-statistics with n-1 degrees of freedom (where n is the number of subsamples) to evaluate the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

# 4. Results

## **4.1. Measurement model**

 Tables 3 and 4 present the information on reliability and validity for all our reflective measures. Table 3 provides evidence of individual and construct reliability (loadings are higher than 0.6, Hair et al., 2010, construct reliability coefficients are higher than 0.7, Hair et al., 2017), as well as the convergent validity of the reflective variables (average variance extracted is higher than 0.5 for any of the reflective constructs of the study, Hair et al., 2017). Table 4, which provides the correlations across all the study variables, also reveals discriminant validity for the reflective measures (HTMTs are lower than the 0.85 threshold and their 95% confidence intervals do not include 1, Hair et al., 2017). Finally, Tables 3 and 4 also include evidence of the effective formative measure of the constructs of both differential added value and basic offer, for which traditional reliability and validity criteria do not apply (Hair et al., 2017). First, in terms of construct-level assessment, both formative constructs (i.e., differential added values and basic offer) fulfil the discriminant validity criterion; the correlations of these formative variables with other study variables are far below the threshold of 0.7, as recommended (see Table 4; Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010). Second, at the indicator level, the tests for multicollinearity involving the formative variables revealed minimal collinearity; the variance inflation factor (VIF) of all items ranged between 1.255 and 1.802 (Table 3), below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017) and all the indicators associated with each of these formative constructs reached significance levels of p<.05 or better (Table 3), thus confirming their relevance (Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010).

**Table 4**

**4.2. Hypothesis testing**

 Figure 2 presents the findings related to our Hypotheses 1–3 for the complete sample (n=516). In support of H1a, offering food that reflects differential added value offer is positively related to customer satisfaction with the food (β=.113, p<.01). Additionally, we found support for our hypothesis that offering food which reflects the basic value offer is positively related to customers’ satisfaction with the food (β=.472, p<.001, H1b). Hypotheses H2 and H3 were also empirically supported: the predictions that customer food satisfaction is positively related to loyalty of customers towards the restaurant (β=.595, p<.001) and to the same food consumed were accepted (β=.294, p<.001).

Finally, to test H4a and H4b, we conducted a multigroup analysis, which considers the type or restaurant attended as a moderator. This process divided the sample into two groups: traditional restaurants (n=345 firms) and fast-food restaurants (n=171). Prior to running the multigroup analysis, the MICOM (measurement invariance of composite models) procedure -involving three steps, that is, a configural invariance test, compositional invariance test, and equality test of composite means and variances - revealed that partial measurement invariance is established (see Table 5). Configurational invariance was present, as the measurement model, structural model and algorithm for the model estimates are identical for each sample (traditional restaurants, fast-food restaurants). Furthermore, composites have a correlation in both samples that is not significantly lower than one (Table 5), thus reflecting that the composites do not differ greatly in the two samples. Finally, the equality test showed that composite means and variances were different across groups. Thus, although full measurement invariance was not present, partial measurement invariance could be established, meaning that path coefficients can be compared across both restaurant types (Hair et al. 2018).

**Figure 2** and **Table 5**

Our multigroup analysis revealed mixed findings for our hypotheses. With regards to our hypothesis H4a, the results revealed that the positive effect of differential added value offer on customer food satisfaction was stronger among customers of restaurants (β=.169, p<.001) compared to customers of fast-food restaurants (β=-0.026, not significant), in full support of H4a (Table 6). However, our prediction that offering food representative of the basic offer might relate to customer satisfaction with the food more strongly among customers of fast-food restaurants was not supported. Although as predicted, this positive and significant effect was higher among customers of fast-food restaurants (β=.492, p<.001) than that found among customers of restaurants (β=.483, p<.001), this difference was not statistically significant, thus leading us not to accept H4b (see Table 6). Hence, offering food in accordance with a differential added value offer does not help increase food satisfaction in customers of fast-food restaurants. In contrast, traditional restaurant managers should make efforts to offer food in line with a differential added value offer as it will help them increase customer satisfaction with the food. Our results also revealed that offering food that follows a basic offer will always be a positive in increasing customer satisfaction with the food consumed, in both traditional and fast-food restaurants.

**Table 6**

# 5. Discussion

 Our findings suggest that **food satisfaction** is positively influenced by basic food values, i.e., appearance, convenience, price, taste and safety. Additionally, food values that go beyond the mere individual benefit for customers, i.e., environmental impact, naturalness, nutrition, origin, tradition and fairness, also influence food satisfaction. However, the importance of the latter values differs between restaurant types. For fast-food restaurants, values which form a differential added value offer have no significant impact on food satisfaction, while, for traditional restaurants, these aspects are important. On the one hand, this suggests that customers differentiate between types of restaurants and the reasons behind their formats. Consumers value aspects such as appearance, convenience, price, taste and safety, while values encapsulating a differential added value offer play a lower role in influencing food satisfaction. On the other hand, the non-significant impact of a differential added values offer on food satisfaction for fast-food restaurants suggests that these restaurants might not sufficiently communicate such values towards their customers. Our results are in line with previous findings showing that fast food restaurants are perceived as providers of less healthy food (Dunn et al., 2008; Schifferstein, 2020). Our results also reveal that the impact of food values is context-dependent: in certain contexts, some food values are less relevant to consumers’ evaluations. Our findings are of great interest for restaurants to improve their positioning and differentiation strategy by taking into account the food values that are most relevant to their customers.

Customer **loyalty to restaurants** is driven by their satisfaction with the food. This satisfaction with the food does not only influence the behaviour towards the restaurant but also the food behaviour itself. Customers with a greater food satisfaction have a greater loyalty to the food. Both effects on loyalty are further different. The impact of food satisfaction is much more relevant for restaurant loyalty than for food loyalty. Hence, customers appear to value the restaurant itself more than any particular food. They might even be flexible in choosing specific food items and are open to different food items, consequently showing they seek variety. This enhances findings from, among others, Ha and Jang (2013), on the effect of food quality and customer satisfaction on customer behaviour toward a restaurant and shows that people can have a loyalty towards the restaurant but choose differently from the menu in the restaurant. It also supports Mason et al.’s research (2016), in which it was observed that restaurants may provide food quality not only in order to improve consumers’ dining satisfaction, but also, to enhance loyalty behaviours toward the restaurant. Finally, this is in line with Uddin (2019), who found that food quality is one of the factors positively linked to restaurant loyalty in the long term by firstly achieving satisfaction in the short term.

 Our findings also provide several implications **for restaurant management.** First, both types of restaurants should place emphasis on food satisfaction to increase loyalty towards the restaurant but also towards the food items itself. These two issues might help increase competitiveness and might even serve as a buffer in critical times of crises, such as a pandemic or a period of inflation. It is worth noting that food satisfaction increases restaurant loyalty to a greater extent than food loyalty. This opens up options to offer a higher variety of products and to introduce or eliminate new menus. It can further be expected that loyal consumers will follow food suggestions from employees. Consequently, the restaurant might be able to guide order behaviour. The influence of food satisfaction on loyalty is (slightly) higher in fast food restaurants. Some of the reasons may be the high degree of standardisation of the food in these restaurants and brand familiarity with the fast-food chains. The slightly smaller positive effect of food satisfaction of fast-food restaurant loyalty can be explained by the structure of this industry. Because of the standardised food items, it is less important to go to a specific restaurant of the restaurant chain. Hence, the loyalty towards a single store is smaller. This provides challenges for the owners of such restaurant if they are franchisees. They might depend on the food selection and advertising of the franchisor company and they might be less able to motivate customers to continuously go to the same restaurant. Such franchisees might search for other options to ensure customer loyalty.

 Second, in traditional restaurants, food satisfaction is influenced by differential added value and basic value offers. Both increase the positive evaluation of food. However, the impact of a basic value offer is higher than that of a differential added value offer. Accordingly, traditional restaurants should focus first on basic values, such as taste and price, although they could greatly benefit from also focusing on differential values, such as environmental impact and local ingredients.

Third, the impact of a differential added values offer on food satisfaction in fast-food restaurants is non-significant. Companies might search for better ways to emphasise doing good for others by investing in environmental topics, an example being McDonalds Philippines, which has opened so-called Green & Good Flagship stores (Salting, 2022).

**6. Conclusions**

Our study makes several noteworthy contributions to the field of consumer behavior and restaurant management. Firstly, it advances existing literature by being the first to compare the effects of food values on consumer perception and behavior in two distinct restaurant types. The results show that food satisfaction is paramount but differs in driving loyalty towards the restaurant and the food itself: the impact on restaurant loyalty is greater than on the food. This supports company efforts in customer relationship marketing that targets store loyalty. Despite ongoing product introduction and communication campaigns about doing good by integrating local suppliers and helping the environment with the restaurant offers, this only pays off for traditional restaurants. For customers of fast-food restaurants, it is simply the basic value of the food that impacts food satisfaction.

Second, research is scant on the effects of different values on consumer perception -here, food satisfaction. In particular, we live in a value-driven world that emphasises the importance of the environment, society and other beneficiaries. Therefore, it is of interest how consumers evaluate this importance for their product and service evaluation. In particular, our findings show that added values do not always influence consumer perceptions nor do they do so similarly. For fast food restaurants, added values had no effect on food satisfaction. This result supports the few studies that show corporate social responsibility activities not only have direct positive effects on consumers (e.g., Harun et al., 2018). This means that despite the media discussion and research focus on values such as the environment, for some businesses these facets have less impact on their consumers. This finding not only shows that simply saying you do good might relate to positive consequences, it is also interesting insofar as many fast-food restaurants have invested in such values by offering vegetarian versions (Piester et al., 2020) and changed packaging to reduce waste and therefore contribute to environmental goals (Bundesverband Systemgastronomie, 2020a).

Third, our study shows that the role of values on consumer perception and behaviour differs across restaurant types. Our findings show that offering food that reflects differential added value offer does not influence customers’ satisfaction of fast-food restaurants but increases food satisfaction in traditional restaurants. Thus, activities of fast-food restaurants such as McDonalds and Domino Pizza, for example, are less convincing from the consumers’ perspective. This finding also suggests that marketing activities should be different across these two restaurant types. Thus, fast-food companies need to identify why added values do not increase food satisfaction and accordingly, to focus on aspects that have a positive impact on food satisfaction.

Fourth, we also show that food satisfaction for both restaurant types has a great influence on loyalty towards the restaurant but a lesser impact on food loyalty. This offers opportunities for restaurants with a broad menu. Such restaurants might change their menus if consumers are willing to try new products. Hence, these restaurants might also face lower customer dissatisfaction if products were removed from the menu because of increasing production costs for example. However, it also means both types of restaurants need to focus on food satisfaction to increase their customers’ loyalty. In today’s times of inflation, such loyalty towards the restaurant is not only beneficial, but also essential, for the survival of restaurants. To investigate the role of food satisfaction on willingness to pay and price premium would be even more relevant for businesses in times of inflation where many firms struggle to earn sufficient to make a reasonable profit and increase increased prices on their menus (Littman, 2022).

Fifth and finally, our study places a much-needed emphasis on small- and medium-sized traditional restaurants that often receive less research attention but contribute significantly to national gross domestic product (GDP). By highlighting their importance in the industry, our study not only provides valuable insights for these restaurants but also contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the restaurant landscape as a whole.

6.1 Further research lines and limitations

While our study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. While our study contributes significant insights, there are avenues for future research. Differentiating food satisfaction across specific menu components, considering factors such as consumer hunger levels or meal size, and exploring novel food consumption as potential drivers could provide deeper insights into the role of food satisfaction in customer loyalty. Longitudinal studies could also offer a better understanding of how the effects of values on food satisfaction evolve over time, particularly in response to external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, integrating marketing communication about sustainability efforts in the fast-food industry and examining its influence on perceptions and intentions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in this context. Finally, exploring the impact of cultural dining norms and educational factors on the perception of differential added values in various countries would enrich our understanding of this topic and its cross-cultural implications.

We also would like to note that our sample was collected by a non-probabilistic sampling method -what is more, we only focused on Spanish consumers; both facts altogether limit the generalizability of our findings to other cultural contexts. Future studies should aim to replicate our research in diverse cultural settings to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of food values on consumer behavior. Secondly, our study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits our ability to establish causal relationships between food values, satisfaction, and loyalty. Longitudinal studies that track changes in consumer perceptions over time would provide stronger evidence of the dynamic nature of these relationships. Furthermore, our study did not differentiate food satisfaction across specific menu components or consider individual differences in taste preferences or dietary restrictions. Examining these factors could provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between food satisfaction and loyalty. And lastly, our study was conducted during a specific period and did not account for dynamics of consumer behavior consumer perceptions and behavior. Future research should consider the impact of changing socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors on the effects of food values and their implications for restaurant management.

**Data Availability Statement**

Data will be made available on reasonable request. The lead author has full access to data reported in the manuscript.

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**Ethical approval**

The data were ethically gathered, and no sensitive nor personally identifiable information from the subjects were collected. A preamble in the questionnaire was added at the beginning explaining what it consisted of and what it is intended to obtain, i.e. the objectives, the voluntary nature of the participation, the anonymous treatment of the data in accordance with the Data Protection Law in force. The respondent voluntarily accepted participation in the study and gave his/her tacit consent by voluntarily answering the survey.

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**Figure 1**. Research model and hypotheses.

**Figure 2**. Structural model and hypothesis testing for the complete, fast-food and traditional restaurants samples.



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| **Table 1**. Technical details of the research. |
| Universe | Residents in the Metropolitan Area of the city of Albacete, Spain |
| Sample unit | People over 18 years old  |
| Data collection method | Personal survey |
| Sample procedure | Non probabilistic |
| Number surveyed | 516 valid surveys (response rate: 97.72%) |
| Period of information collection | March - April (2019) |

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| **Table 2.** Sociodemographic profile. |
| **Variable**  |  | **Total** **n=516** | **Restaurant** **n=345** | **Fast-Food** **Restaurant n=171** |
| Gender | Male | 56.2% | 56.5% | 55.6% |
| Female | 43.8% | 43.5% | 44.4% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Age  | 18-25 | 57.6% | 46.4% | 80.1% |
| 26-45 | 28.1% | 33.0% | 18.1% |
| 46-65 | 13.0% | 18.8% | 1.2% |
| >65 | 1.4% | 1.7% | 0.6% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Education  | Lower than high school | 16.3% | 15.9% | 17% |
| High school | 42.8% | 38.8% | 50.9% |
| Undergraduate | 32.6% | 34.5% | 28.7% |
| Postgraduate  | 8.3% | 10.7% | 3.5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Monthly Income | < 900 Euros | 36% | 28.4% | 51.5% |
| 901-1,200 Euros | 19.8% | 21.2% | 17.0% |
| 1,201-1,800 Euros | 15.1% | 16.2% | 12.9% |
| 1,800-2,100 Euros | 11.0% | 11.6% | 9.9% |
| 2,101-2,800 Euros | 8.5% | 10.7% | 4.1% |
| >2,800 Euros | 9.5% | 11.9% | 4.7% |

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| Table 3. Measurement Model, Item Loadings, Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity. |
| Construct/Variable | **Items** |  | **Weight** | **Loading** | **VIF** | **Cronbach’s α** | **CR**  | **AVE**  |
| Differential Added Value Offer (F) |  |  |  |  |  | ---- |  |  |
| Environmental Impact | DAO1 | Effect of food production on the environment | 0.226\*\*\* |  | 1.542 |  |  |
| Naturalness | DAO2 | Food produced without modern technologies | 0.264\*\*\* |  | 1.455 |
| Nutrition | DAO3 | Nutritional value of food | 0.267\*\*\* |  | 1.551 |
| Origin | DAO4 | “Where” the agricultural commodities used to make the food were grown | 0.202\*\* |  | 1.746 |
| Tradition | DAO5 | Preservation of traditional consumption patterns | 0.138\* |  | 1.429 |
| Fairness | DAO6 | Presence of fairness during the food’s production and distribution  | 0.169\*\* |  | 1.802 |
| Basic Value Offer (F) |  |  |  |  |  | ----- |  |  |
| Appearance | BO1 | Extent to which the food seems appealing | 0.345\*\*\* |  | 1.412 |  |
| Convenience | BO2 | Ease with which food is cooked or consumed | 0.168\*\* |  | 1.255 |  |
| Price | BO3 | Price of food | 0.172\*\* |  | 1.280 |  |
| Taste | BO4 | Taste of food | 0.398\*\*\* |  | 1.678 |  |
| Safety | BO5 | Food does not cause illnesses | 0.283\*\*\* |  | 1.520 |  |
| Food Satisfaction (R) |  |  |  |  |  | 0.931 | 0.951 | 0.829 |
| Compared food satisfaction  | FS1 | The degree of satisfaction with the food in this last meal, compared to other restaurants |  | 0.921 |  |
| Fulfilled food expectations | FS2 | The food consumed met my expectations |  | 0.936 |  |
| Experience satisfaction  | FS3 | I was satisfied with the dining experience at the restaurant |  | 0.866 |  |
| Correct food choice  | FS4 | The choice of these foods seemed right |  | 0.917 |  |
| Restaurant Loyalty (R) |  |  |  |  |  | 0.759 | 0.851 | 0.663 |
| Consumption majority | RL1 | I do most of my food consumption at this establishment |  | 0.605 |  |
| Restaurant recommendation | RL2 | Whenever possible, I recommend this establishment |  | 0.887 |  |
| Behavioural restaurant loyalty | RL3 | I plan to continue consuming food at this restaurant |  | 0.914 |  |
| Food Loyalty (R) |  |  |  |  |  | 0.698 | 0.868 | 0.767 |
| Food recommendation | FL1 | Whenever I can I recommend these foods |  | 0.856 |  |
| Behavioural food loyalty | FL2 | I intend to continue consuming these foods |  | 0.895 |  |
| Notes: CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted. R=Reflective; F=Formative; VIF=Variance Inflation Factor. \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. |

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| Table 4. Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Matrix, and Discriminant Validity. Heterotrait-monotrait ratios of correlations (HTMT) in italics. |
|  Constructs  | **Mean** | **SD** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |
| 1. Differential Added Value Offer  | 3.18 | 0.87 | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  |  ----  | ----  |
| 2. Basic Value Offer | 3.89 | 0.72 | 0.471\*\* |  ---- | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  | ----  |
| 3. Food Satisfaction | 3.83 | 0.93 | 0.335\*\* | 0.526\*\* | **----** | *0.636**[0.565;0.690]* | *0.348 [0.251;0.434]* | *0.059 [0.014;0.130]* | *0.068**[0.025;0.133]* | *0.035**[0.013;0.050]* | *0.078**[0.025;0.144]* |
| 4. Restaurant Loyalty | 3.16 | 0.97 | 0.233\*\* | 0.309\*\* | 0.596\*\* | **----** | *0.742 [0.659;0.801]* |  *0.069 [0.017;0.110]* | *0.122**[0.073;0.173]* | *0.074**[0.025;0.101]* | *0.010**[0.004;0.010]* |
| 5. Food Loyalty | 3.22 | 1.01 | 0.059 | 0.246\*\* | 0.282\*\* | 0.493\*\* | **----** | *0.050**[0.009;0.119]* | *0.041**[0.003;0.082]* | *0.105**[0.031;0.195]* | *0.080**[0.025;0.160]* |
| 6. Age  | 1.58 | 1.58 | 0.222\*\* | -0.014 | 0.057 | 0.028 | -0.042 | ---- | *0.379**[0.307;0.436]* | *0.082**[0.011;0.158]* | *0.022**[0.000;0.067]* |
| 7. Monthly Income | 2.65 | 1.68 | 0.025 | 0.040 | 0.067 | 0.054 | -0.033 | 0.379\*\* | ---- | *0.171**[0.101;0.236]* | *0.011**[0.000;0.025]* |
| 8. Education | 2.33 | 0.84 | 0.022 | -0.019 | 0.010 | -0.014 | -0.087\* | 0.082 | 0.171\*\* | ---- | *0.025**[0.001;0.068]* |
| 9. Gender | ---- | --- | -0.026 | -0.040 | 0.075 | 0.011 | -0.067 | -0.022 | 0.011 | -0.025 | ---- |
| Notes: \* *p*<0.05. \*\* *p*<0.01. SD=standard deviation. Off-diagonal elements above the diagonal are HTMTs and their 95% confidence intervals.  |

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| **Table 5.** MICOM results for testing measurement invariance of the composites. |
| Composite | c-value (=1) | 95% confidence interval  | Compositional invariance? |
| Differential Added Value Offer | 0.655 | [0.630,1.000] | Yes |
| Basic Value Offer | 0.946 | [0.869.1.000] | Yes |
| Food Satisfaction | 1.000 | [1.000,1.000] | Yes |
| Restaurant Loyalty | 0.998 | [0.990,1.000] | Yes  |
| Food Loyalty | 1.000 | [0.983,1.000] | Yes  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Composite | Logarithm of the composite’svariances ratio (= 0) | 95% confidence interval  | Equal variances? |
| Differential Added Value Offer | 0.272 | [-0.207,0.192] | No |
| Basic Value Offer | 0.370 | [-0.351,0.371] | Yes |
| Food Satisfaction | 0.050 | [-0.238,0.231] | Yes |
| Restaurant Loyalty | 0.009 | [-0.224,0.204] | Yes  |
| Food Loyalty | 0.106 | [-0.211,0.193] | Yes  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Composite | Difference of the composite’s mean value (= 0) | 95% confidence interval  | Equal means? |
| Differential Added Value Offer | -0.563 | [-0.197,0.194] | No |
| Basic Value Offer | -0.209 | [-0.190,0.190] | No |
| Food Satisfaction | -0.526 | [-0.176,0.172] | No |
| Restaurant Loyalty | -0.414 | [-0.170,0.183] | No |
| Food Loyalty | 0.198 | [-0.186,0.184] | No |
| **Notes:** Conditions for equal variances and means across the two groups were not fulfilled. However, compositional invariance condition was fulfilled, and thus partial measurement invariance can be supported (Hair et al., 2018).  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Table 6.** Multi-group analysis test results. Hypothesis testing for H4a and H4b. |
| **Relationship**  | **Fast-Food Path Coefficient** | **Traditional Path Coefficient** | **Diff. (Fast-Food versus Traditional)** | **t-parametric** | **t-Welch-Satterthwait** | **p-value Henseler**  | **p-value Permutation** | **Hypothesis Support** |
| Differential Added Value Offer → Food Satisfaction  | -0.026 | 0.169 | -0.195\* | 1.841 | 1.651 | 0.029 | 0.029 | H4a Supported |
| Basic Value Offer→ Food Satisfaction  | 0.493 | 0.482 | 0.012 | 0.135 | 0.135 | 0.443 | 0.897 | H4b Rejected  |
| Food Satisfaction → Restaurant Loyalty  | 0.563 | 0.581 | -0.018 | 0.261 | 0.279 | 0.392 | 0.779 | - |
| Food Satisfaction → Food Loyalty  | 0.341 | 0.307 | 0.034 | 0.364 | 0.371 | 0.350 | 0.716 | - |
| **Notes:** \*Significant at p<0.05. |