



# Navigating Dining Satisfaction by Understanding Diner Hygiene Expectation and Experience

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## ABSTRACT

Indian Muslim eateries are a prominent part of Malaysian food culture and gastronomic tourism. However, according to the local the news, these eateries are plagued with negative hygienic issues. As this could endanger the diner's overall health and well-being, it is a serious concern. Therefore, this study posits hygiene expectation and hygiene experience as the primary determinants of diner satisfaction. Expectation disconfirmation theory was used as a theoretical base for this study, as it allows the researcher to postulate the interaction between expectation and experience and its effect on issues concerning hygienic food service. The body of knowledge and ethical practice of Halal food literacy contributed by this study will benefit food operators that are interested in consumer dining satisfaction from a hygiene perspective.

**Keywords:** Dining Satisfaction, Expectation, Experience, Hygiene

**JEL Classifications:** L66, L83

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian news has reported numerous cases of hygiene violation in the country's food eateries, which is a serious concern, as these threaten the diner's overall health and well-being. The current scenario is worrying with many food premises being closed down in the past year due to this violation. For instance, at least one violation was found during inspections in 2013 and 2014 involving 6876 and 4080 food premises, respectively (Rajendra, 2014). Moreover, according to The National Consumer Complaints Centre (2015) (as reported in the Safety Insider, September 2015), the consumer food safety-related complaints that the Centre has received have increased from 2006 to 2013 by 84%.

Indian Muslim Restaurants operating around the country are believed to earn profits of more than RM 8 billion annually (Aziz et al., 2016). However, this number could exponentially increase if these restaurants implemented proper hygienic food services. Unfortunately, this is not the case; Indian Muslim food eateries have committed numerous hygiene-related infringements

including employing non-vaccinated workers, allowing food contamination from food poisoning microbes, as well as letting pets roam free near the eateries. Meanwhile, the restaurants' mishandling of food has contributed to 50% of reported foodborne illnesses (Masyita et al., 2017). These hygienic lapses have dominated news headlines, provoking the concern and anger of the public, which is justified considering the poor food safety practices that are still evident in the Malaysian food service industry (Lim et al., 2016).

This study aims to develop a good understanding of the hygienic issues plaguing Indian Muslim Restaurants in Malaysia particularly from the perspective of diners' expectation and experience. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the influence of hygiene expectation and hygiene experience on dining satisfaction. The relationship between customer expectation and satisfaction has gained significant attention in the literature (Yi and Natarajan, 2018; Yüksel and Yüksel, 2001). However, the exact definition of the terms "hygiene expectation" and "hygiene experience" as well as the current policy deterrents against poor food hygiene practices are still

unknown and have not been much studied, particularly the hygienic practices of Indian Muslim restaurants. Hence, this study emphasises the urgent need to understand precise hygiene expectations and hygiene experiences for implementing food hygiene standards that ensure the safeguarding of public health. In addition, this work also contributes to Halal food literacy, which is important in the Muslim food service sector, by providing insights into the hygienic conditions of Indian Muslim restaurants to improve the operating system and ensure compliance with Halal food guidelines.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Malaysian Indian Muslim Restaurant

Indian Muslim restaurants operate 24 h a day (or until late hours of the night), 365 days a year, making them a popular public sphere where Malaysians hang out and socialise. The main operators of these restaurants, which can be found almost everywhere in most Malaysian cities, are Indian Muslims. The cheerful, open-air, and comfortable dining environment is a critical success factor that has contributed to the massive popularity of Indian Muslim restaurants in Malaysia (Othman *et al.*, 2018).

### 2.2. The Customer Satisfaction Notion

Customer satisfaction studies conducted worldwide have concluded that expectation is essential for confirming satisfaction—either positive disconfirmation (perceived performance is more than expectation) or negative disconfirmation (perceived performance is below expectation) (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2001). In particular, expectation disconfirmation theory amplifies the mechanism of discrepancy between perceived performance and expectation (Oliver, 1980). It concludes that satisfaction emphasises post-acceptance and post-consumption expectation factors (Rahi and Abd, 2019; Yi and Natarajan, 2018).

Perceived performance occurs when expectation is equal to observed performance, but this does not fully represent satisfaction measurement. For instance, Bilgili *et al.* (2018) explained that waiting time in a restaurant is one of the vital attributes of service quality. However, the perceived performance of service quality could also be affected by the lighting ambience in the restaurant where they found that consumers perceived a shorter waiting time in a greenish lighting ambience. Grandey *et al.* (2005) found that a genuine smile was able to enhance the perceptions of service staff friendliness and satisfaction. These studies imply that business organisations have striven to influence and alter consumer perception to ensure that consumer expectation is always within reach.

In food service, customer satisfaction studies have proposed different definitions of satisfaction. Andaleeb and Conway (2006) described satisfaction as simply “overall customer satisfaction based on the evaluation of experiences with service quality, product quality, and price.” Alhelalat *et al.* (2017) defined fine dining satisfaction based only on service staff behavioural components. Shariff *et al.* (2017) defined customer satisfaction as the consumer action of revisiting a restaurant. Boo (2017) described satisfaction as the evaluation of a restaurant’s overall service environment.

The post-adoption context explains that expectation is a combination of experiences by which actual usage experience influences consumer satisfaction. Expectation towards a service could be formed by various factors, including experience, advertisement communication, reputation, customer background, and the next-purchase psychological state or the purchase environment at the point of purchase (Szymanski and Henard, 2001; Baiardi *et al.*, 2016). In other words, experience could differ from initial perception; so perceived performance may just be a marketing placebo effect (Shiv *et al.*, 2005).

### 2.3. Hygiene Experience

Customer experience has slowly superseded the notion of perceived performance in recent years (Roy, 2018); however, the exploration of customer experience has not yet fully formed and is tedious within a small dimension (Schmitt, 2003). Restaurant atmospheric studies acknowledge cleanliness as a practice to achieve and maintain an atmosphere that is free from hazardous or harmful substances (i.e. cleanliness of dining room, restrooms) (Hussein, 2018; Ryu and Jang, 2007). Fatimah *et al.* (2011) acknowledged that variations in hygiene evaluation criteria exist due to the wide availability of low-scale food premises. Therefore, understanding consumer hygiene expectation in the Indian Muslim restaurant segment would be a challenge without directly focusing on addressing specific issues such as food service operation compliance needs. This can be differentiated by clearly understanding diners’ hygiene expectation and hygiene experience.

The diner’s experience is a subjective response generated from the diner’s contact with service that embeds the key value proposition that it offers (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). Moreover, it also accounts for how the service or product is provided instead of merely the product or service offering (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Thus, the present study introduces and validates a new construct, which is “hygiene experience,” to continue the exploration of consumer satisfaction based on underlying consumer satisfaction theories. Therefore, it extends the body of knowledge on consumer satisfaction pertaining to dining satisfaction based on the diner’s experience and expectation because dining involves myriad touch points along the chain of touch points; hence, expectation level might be influenced by consumption experience. Indian Muslim restaurant operators could apply the findings of this study to raise diner satisfaction level by ensuring food service quality through advocating hygienic food service operations.

### 2.4. Research Hypothesis

Food premise design may affect the premise environment. Thus, the dining area should be comfortable and hazard free, and the decorations must follow the restaurant theme to ensure specific customer experience, expectation, and satisfaction. A customer’s restaurant preferences and expectations based on past experiences of different types of restaurants form their expectation towards a restaurant. Therefore, it is possible to predict diner satisfaction from the diner’s subjective fulfilment of expectations based on the selected restaurant.

Ryu and Zhong (2012) revealed that restaurant menu choices mediated the relationship between risk-taking behaviour and

disconfirmation, and significantly influenced customer satisfaction in an authentic Chinese restaurant. Another interesting finding by Kuo and Barber (2014) was that dishware materials could have an impact on consumers' overall evaluation of product attributes and the perceived quality of the dishware mediated this relationship. It was also found that consumers associated food served in dishware of different materials with different types of restaurants. The colour of a service cup, for example, had a mediating role in influencing drinking experience and acceptance of certain beverages (Spence and Wan, 2015). Nostalgic design in a restaurant positively affected experiential customer value and consumption intention (Chen *et al.*, 2014). Design factors helped diners from different cultural backgrounds enjoy the dining experience through contemporary interior styles and trends (Maharani, 2013). When consumer perception of the design factor matches or exceeds expectations, future expectation will likely increase. To predict customer satisfaction, it is necessary that all customer expectations be met with subsequent delivery experiences.

Empirical evidence supports the effect of dining experience based on food quality (Namkung and Jang, 2007; Wijaya *et al.*, 2017). Food quality has emerged as a reliable predictor of experience and satisfaction. Wu (2017) conducted a coffee chain study to investigate the key drivers of experiential loyalty. The study found that experiential quality (judgement initiated by consumers), perceived value (overall assessment of product or service), and experiential trust (trust resulting from experience) were reliable predictors of experiential satisfaction (compared with prior expectation). According to Srivastava and Kaul (2014), the social interaction between customer and service personnel fostered customer satisfaction, and shopping experience could be enhanced by social interaction. Therefore, the mediating role of "experience" exists (Azad and Allahyari, 2017) and experience affects satisfaction (Hussein, 2017).

Perception of ambience quality is affected by customer expectation and experience. Ryu and Han (2011) studied and supported this proposition by looking at first-time or repeat customers in an upscale restaurant. 1<sup>st</sup>-time customers benchmarked their expectations against previous experiences. Meanwhile, repeat customers based their satisfaction on their previous dining experience in that restaurant. Therefore, predictive expectation influences the evaluation of satisfaction towards consumption experience (Fornell *et al.*, 1996).

Fernández-Sabiote and Román (2016) suggested the link between the social interaction of service personnel and customer expectation in financial services; if the customer expected professional financial consultation services, the positive influence of customer satisfaction was stronger than the customer with a lower expectation or demand for interaction. Diners have shown great satisfaction in restaurants with employee functional practises (serving food with good hygiene practices, knowing the ingredients of the dishes, and many others) and personal practices (clean and tidy clothes, clean and neat hair, speaks in a friendly manner, polite, etc.) (Alhelalat *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it can be inferred that positive service personnel experience can enhance dining satisfaction.

Based on the above literature, the hypotheses below are proposed. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesis relationship.

H<sub>1</sub>: Hygiene expectation has a significant and positive impact on diner satisfaction.

H<sub>2</sub>: Hygiene experience has a significant and positive impact on diner satisfaction.

H<sub>3</sub>: Hygiene experience mediates the relationship between hygiene expectation and diner satisfaction.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Collection

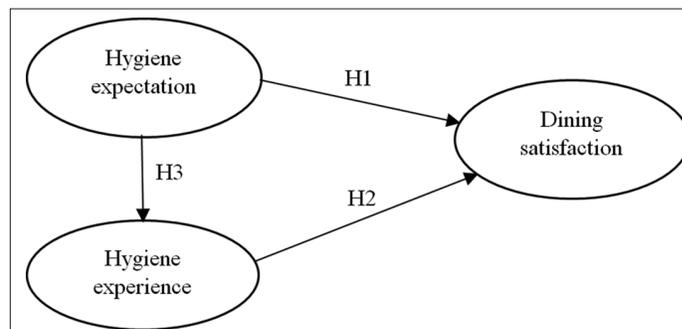
This study focused on Indian Muslim restaurants in Selangor, the most densely populated State in Malaysia. The sample comprised 300 diners whose responses were acquired using a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared in English and Bahasa Malaysia and was based on a 5-point Likert scale. The respondents were selected purposively; stratified sampling was used to ensure representation of the chosen population with respect to Malaysia's three major ethnic groups: Bumiputera (179), Chinese (82), and Indians (38). These pre-requisite rules ensured data quality, as the rules provide valid consideration of the chosen target respondents relevant to the study (Link, 2018).

A summary of the above-explained sample is provided in Table 1. The questionnaire was distributed to diners inside restaurants, with prior approval obtained from the restaurateurs, and the diners leaving the restaurant.

#### 3.2 Measurement Model

Table 2 summarises the measurement criteria used in this study: (1) indicator reliability loading; all the indicators achieved an outer loading minimum threshold of 0.7 or higher. The indicators that achieved outer loadings of above 0.7 were considered highly satisfactory (Henseler *et al.*, 2009); (2) Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to assess the reliability of the seven constructs in the study. The standardised loading mechanism of composite reliability is a better measurement of internal consistency compared to the conventional Cronbach's alpha. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were interpreted in the same way; past literature suggested that the value of Cronbach's

Figure 1: Proposed research model



alpha and composite reliability should be higher than 0.7, the minimum tolerance level.

**Table 1: A summary of the sample profile**

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	131	43.7
Female	169	56.3
Total	300	100
Marital status		
Single	216	72.0
Married	75	25.0
Others	9	3.0
Total	300	100
Education level		
High school or less	96	32.0
College/University	204	68.0
Total	300	100.0
Occupation		
Executive	45	15
Non-executive	26	8.7
Managerial	34	11.3
Others	195	65.0
Total	300	100
Ethnic group		
Malay	179	59.7
Chinese	83	27.7
Indian	38	12.70
Total	300	100

The present study revealed the three latent constructs had convergent validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should be above the recommended cut-off of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results reveal that all constructs in the study i.e. hygiene expectation (0.787), hygiene experience (0.736), and dining satisfaction (0.692) are able to explain more than half of the variance of the items measured on average.

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity results. The Fornell and Larcker criterion states that the square root of AVE for each construct should be greater than a construct's correlation with the other (i.e. inter-construct correlation). Table 3 shows that none of the inter-construct correlation values was above the square root of AVE; thus all satisfied the criterion of discriminant validity. Also, the HTMT values were computed with a benchmark predefined threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2011). Other studies proposed a benchmark value of 0.90 (Gold et al., 200). Therefore, there was little discriminant validity, and no overlapping items from the respondents' perception when measuring the constructs. This means that the items used for measuring the constructs have satisfactory internal consistency.

### 3.3. Structural Model

The PLS structural model (Figure 2) was developed for each of the proposed hypothesis. A total of 5000 subsamples were bootstrapped to obtain the path estimates and standard error, while t-statistics

**Table 2: Validity and reliability results**

Latent variable/indicator	Indicator	Internal consistency	$\alpha$	AVE
	reliability loading	reliability (composite reliability)		
	>0.70	>0.70	>0.70	>0.50
Hygiene expectation		0.949	0.932	0.787
1. The restaurant's hygienic ambience (clean environment) is better than my expectation	0.8590			
2. The restaurant's hygiene facility aesthetics (interior design, décor) are better than my expectation	0.8330			
3. The well-organised layout provides an excellent dining experience	0.8610			
4. The restaurant has a thoroughly clean dining area	0.8800			
5. The restaurant offers excellent cleanliness experience	0.8730			
6. The clean washrooms in the restaurant provide an excellent dining experience	0.8400			
Hygiene experience		0.943	0.928	0.736
1. The overall ambience of the restaurant provides an excellent dining experience	0.8000			
2. The clean tableware (e.g., glasses, plates, and cutlery) provides an excellent dining experience	0.8590			
3. The well-organised layout provides an excellent dining experience	0.8610			
4. The restaurant has a thoroughly clean dining area	0.8670			
5. The restaurant offers excellent cleanliness experience	0.8630			
6. The clean washrooms of the restaurant provide excellent cleanliness experience	0.7460			
Hygiene satisfaction		0.932	0.912	0.695
1. I am pleased with my decision to dine in this restaurant	0.8930			
2. Based on all my experiences with this restaurant, i am satisfied	0.8990			
3. The restaurant assures cleanliness and hygiene for the services offered	0.8650			
4. I have enjoyed dining at this restaurant	0.8990			
5. The overall feeling that I get from this restaurant is positive	0.8800			

was used to examine the variable relationships. In addition, the model’s explanatory power, R<sup>2</sup>, was calculated to indicate the amount of variance explained by the exogenous variable (hygiene expectation and hygiene experience). Meanwhile, predictive power and path coefficient (β) were utilised to determine the magnitude of strength of the path coefficient values. As suggested by Hair et al. (1998), predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) and relative impact (q<sup>2</sup>) values of <0.2 are weak, 0.2-0.5 are moderate, and more than 0.5 are robust.

**3.3.1. Model explanatory power, R<sup>2</sup>**

The R<sup>2</sup> value indicates the acceptable level of latent variables. The results show that hygiene expectation can predict about 72% of dining satisfaction. Similarly, hygiene expectation and dining satisfaction can anticipate about 55% of the changes in hygiene experience.

Hypothesis 1 shows a positive and significant relationship between “hygiene expectation” and “dining satisfaction”; the path relationship between these two variables was 0.467, indicating that hygiene expectation can predict about 72% of the variation in dining satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted, and it can

be stated that if hygiene expectation is fulfilled, dining satisfaction in the subject population can improve, subject to a 5% error level.

Hypothesis 2 indicates a positive and significant relationship between “hygiene expectation” and “hygiene experience,” where the path of these two variables was 0.744, so this result predicted by 55% of the variation in dining satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted. Hence, the role of experience is indeed an important factor in determining dining satisfaction with a 5% error level.

Hypothesis 3 indicates a positive and significant relationship between “dining satisfaction” and “hygiene experience.” The path relationship between these two variables was 0.442. Therefore, “dining satisfaction” can be predicted by “hygiene experience”.

**4.1. Path Coefficient Analysis**

Based on Table 4, the path coefficient test obtained a t-value of 8.152 for the relationship between hygiene experience and dining satisfaction, which exceeds the value of 1.96 (α=5%). Therefore, H1 is accepted and hygiene expectation indeed positively influences dining satisfaction in Indian Muslim restaurants. Next, the t-value for hygiene expectation and hygiene experience was 20.466, which exceeds the value of 1.96 (α=5%), thus H2 is accepted. Hence, it is concluded that hygiene expectation can positively influence hygiene experience. Furthermore, for Hypothesis 3, the results show a t-value of 8.566, which exceeds the value of 1.96 (α=5%); therefore, H1 is accepted and hygiene experience has a positive effect on dining satisfaction.

Generally, a larger VIF indicates the presence of multicollinearity. In the context of PLS-SEM, a VIF value of 5 indicates potential strong multicollinearity issues (Sarstedt et al., 2014). The current study obtained satisfactory inner VIF value. Table 4 reveals that the largest VIF value was 2.24, and thus there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables.

**Table 3: Discriminant validity**

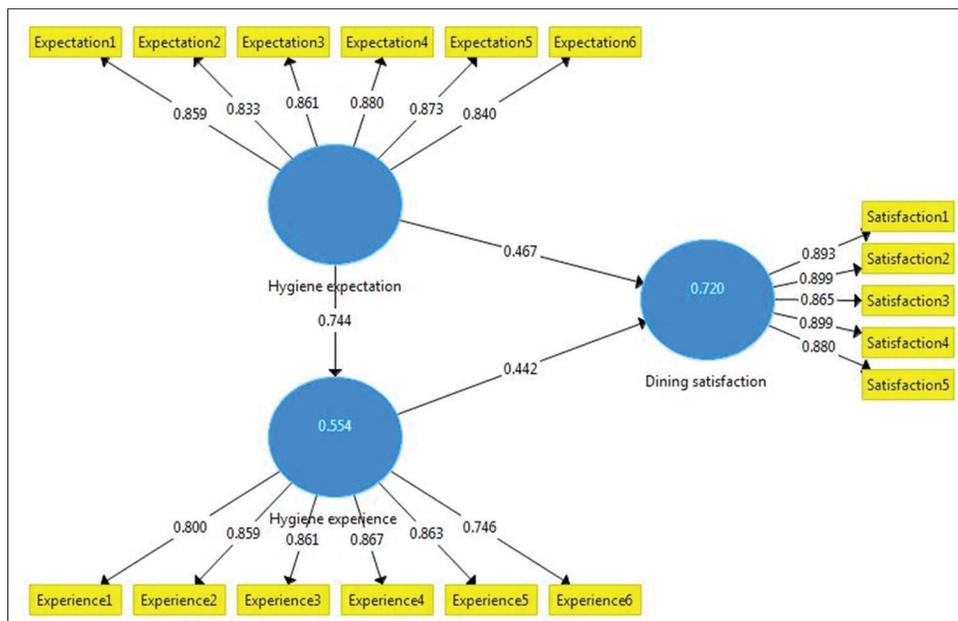
Constructs	Fornell and Larcker criteria		
	Dining satisfaction	Hygiene expectation	Hygiene experience
Dining satisfaction	0.887		
Hygiene expectation	0.796	0.858	
Hygiene experience	0.789	0.744	0.834

Constructs	Discriminant validity (HTMT)		
	Dining satisfaction	Hygiene expectation	Hygiene experience
Dining satisfaction			
Hygiene expectation	0.853		
Hygiene experience	0.849	0.803	

The diagonal is the square root of AVE of the latent variable and indicates the highest in any column or row

**Figure 2: Measurement model results**



**Table 4: Direct path coefficients**

Hypothesis relationship	Std. beta	Std. error	(t-value)^	Decision	95%CI LL	95% CI UL	VIF	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>
H <sub>1</sub> : Hygiene expectation -> dining satisfaction	0.467	0.057	8.152**	Supported	0.364	0.552	2.242	0.720	0.347
H <sub>2</sub> : Hygiene expectation -> hygiene experience	0.744	0.036	20.466**	Supported	0.684	0.799	1.00		1.242
H <sub>3</sub> : Hygiene experience -> dining satisfaction	0.442	0.052	8.566**	Supported	0.364	0.534	2.242	0.554	0.311

\*\* P&lt;0.01, \*P&lt;0.05

**Table 5: Indirect path coefficients**

Exogenous variable	Direct effect (H <sub>1</sub> )	Indirect effect (H <sub>3</sub> *H <sub>2</sub> )	Total effect (direct effect+indirect effect)	VAF range (direct/[indirect-total effect])	Mediation
Hygiene experience	0.467	0.3288	0.795	0.415	Partial

## 4.2. Mediation Analysis

The bootstrapping approach was used to examine the mediation effect on direct relationship testing was performed. The results reported in Table 5 show the magnitude of the indirect effect of the mediating variable (hygiene experience) on the relationship between the exogenous latent construct (hygiene expectation) and the endogenous latent construct (dining satisfaction) by looking at the variation accounted for (VAF). As suggested by Hair et al. (2013, p. 224), if  $0 < \text{VAF} < 0.20$ , then there is no mediation; if  $0.20 < \text{VAF} < 0.80$ , then there is partial mediation; and if  $\text{VAF} > 0.80$ , then there is full mediation. Table 5 indicates that an indirect effect explains more than 40% of the total effect of an exogenous variable (hygiene expectation) on dining satisfaction. Hence, the effect of hygiene expectation on dining satisfaction is partially mediated by hygiene experience.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hygiene expectation has a significant and positive impact on diner satisfaction (H<sub>1</sub>): The direct influence of hygiene expectation on diner satisfaction is statistically significant ( $\beta=0.467$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). This result is consistent with the literature on customer satisfaction where expectation fulfilment correlates to satisfaction (Oliver, 1997; Zairi, 2000). The results are also in good agreement with the findings of Tama (2015) in that cleanliness is a significant predictor in determining customer satisfaction. This suggests that expectation is a basic requirement in determining satisfaction, particularly in Indian Muslim restaurants, which require the exact problem to be identified so that proficient and effective diagnosis is achieved. Aksoydan (2007) advocated that failure to adhere to hygienic food services or a lower awareness of restaurant hygiene compared to customer expectation would result in customers' perceiving the restaurant as having low service quality; thus resulting in dissatisfied customers.

Hygiene experience has a significant and positive impact on diner satisfaction (H<sub>2</sub>): The path of hygiene experience to dining satisfaction is reportedly significant ( $\beta=0.744$ ;  $P < 0.0001$ ); therefore hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> is statistically supported. This finding is consistent with the literature, which states that dining experience leads to satisfaction (Canny, 2014; Gagić et al., 2013). In one study, a full-service restaurant dining experience proved to be a significant predictor of customer loyalty and manifested in a higher level of satisfaction (Jin et al., 2015). Experience could be

structured from the start to the end of service (Ellis et al., 2019). Therefore, maintaining hygienic food premises could be done from the start to the end of dining and the hygiene experience managed alongside. Embedding hygiene experience in the framework provides a better understanding of the diners' dining journey and enables flawless execution of the dining journey.

Hygiene experience mediates the relationship between hygiene expectation and diner satisfaction (H<sub>3</sub>): Hypothesis H3 is supported ( $\beta=0.442$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). This finding between the relationship of hygiene expectation and hygiene experience is essentially the same as that reported in the consumer experience literature where the direct interaction created between expectation and experience formed a bond that synchronised into a single event (del Bosque and San Martín, 2008; van Dolen et al., 2004). The importance of expectation confirms that satisfaction judgments are based on consumption experience (Yi and Nataraajan, 2018). Also, experience allows diners to recognise the hygiene condition of the restaurant based on the knowledge gained throughout the diners' dining journey. Hence, the model confirms that hygiene expectation is directly related to satisfaction; hygiene expectation and hygiene experience combine (multiply) to signify an indirect effect.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Data collection was the most critical limitation of this study. The data was collected from only three Indian Muslim restaurants in the Selangor region during mealtime inside the Indian Muslim restaurant or after mealtime as the customer was leaving the restaurant (outside the restaurant compound). Therefore, the respondent might refer to current experience when answering the questionnaires; so the generalisation of the findings needs to be handled carefully because the results cannot be generalised to include other types of restaurants. Therefore, further studies are needed to examine the same variables using a larger sample. Additionally, further studies should involve more restaurants in different districts in Selangor.

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