

THE ROLE OF PRODUCT AUTHENTICITY AND BRAND EXPERIENCE IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF IMPERIAL DELICACY IN VIETNAM'S F&B MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of product authenticity and brand experience on customer satisfaction within Vietnam's F&B sector, using Imperial Delicacy as a representative case. The study further examines how perceived value moderates these relationships. Using quantitative methods, we gathered data from 385 consumers across major Vietnamese urban centers and analyzed responses using SPSS, including reliability assessment, factor analysis, and regression modeling. Findings demonstrate substantial positive effects: product authenticity ($\beta = 0.66$) and brand experience ($\beta = 0.61$) significantly enhance customer satisfaction, while perceived value serves as a decisive moderating factor ($\beta = 0.65$). These results validate key principles from experiential marketing and self-determination theory, particularly the value of culturally rooted authenticity and multisensory brand engagement in fostering customer loyalty. The research makes critical theoretical contributions to emerging-market consumer behavior studies by elucidating the dynamic interaction among emotional, cultural, and value-based purchase drivers. For industry practitioners, the study offers actionable recommendations to optimize brand strategies in Vietnam's competitive F&B market, suggesting innovative approaches that harmonize traditional authenticity with contemporary consumer expectations.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and highly competitive Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, customer satisfaction can be taken for granted as the cornerstone of sustainable business success. Among the countless factors influencing consumer perceptions, product authenticity and brand experience have emerged as core elements in forming customer satisfaction, loyalty, and competitiveness differentiation. Product authenticity, often defined as the perceived genuineness and truthfulness of a product, or also described in terms of sincerity, purity and uniqueness; and brand experience refers to internal and subjective consumer reactions – such as sensations, emotions, thoughts and behaviors – triggered by brand-related elements, including design, packaging, communication and environment; are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of consumer satisfaction (Napoli et al., 2014; Özer & Köse, 2013). The purpose of this study is to take a deep dive into the roles these constructs can play in shaping customer satisfaction within the context of Imperial Delicacy, one of the leading brands in Vietnam's F&B market. The particular significance of this topic lies in an era when consumers increasingly prioritize authentic, culturally rooted experiences over generic offerings and even

better-performing ones (Newman & Dhar, 2014), making it crucial for businesses to understand how to leverage these dimensions to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty effectively.

Despite the growing body of literature on product authenticity and brand experience, a notable gap remains in understanding how these elements independently contribute to the relationship between customer satisfaction, particularly in evolving markets such as Vietnam. Most existing researchers tend to conduct studies in inter-regional settings, primarily comparing North America with Asia or examining differences among Europe, Asia, and North America (Timokhina et al., 2015), indicating limited attention to Southeast Asian. For instance, de Mooij & Hofstede (2011) noted that most aspects of consumer behavior are culture-bound. However, research has primarily focused on Western cultures, often overlooking the unique cultural, economic, and social factors that influence consumer perceptions in Southeast Asia. To address the void of theoretical and practical knowledge, the authors choose to apply The Role of Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) and Experiential Marketing Theory (EMT) as foundational frameworks, while also exploring the moderating role of perceived value in brand experience, and how perceived value stimulates the connection between brand experience and customer satisfaction. By focusing on Imperial Delicacy, a brand that exemplifies the fusion of traditional Vietnamese culinary heritage with modern market demand, this paper not only contributes to academic discourse but also provides actionable insights for businesses operating in culturally rich, rapidly evolving markets.

This study seeks to narrow these gaps by exploring two primary research questions. The first main questions investigate: "How positively do product authenticity and brand experience impact customer satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B market?" The second research question examines: "To what extent does perceived value moderate the connection between brand experience and customer satisfaction?". The objectives of this study are threefold: first, the paper seeks to shed light on the conceptual framework surrounding product authenticity and brand experience, and to analyze how these mechanisms collectively and independently influence customer satisfaction. Secondly, the authors will explore the moderating role of perceived value in enhancing the impact of brand experience on customer satisfaction. Finally, this paper aims to provide practical insights for F&B businesses by proposing actionable strategies to leverage product authenticity and brand experience, ultimately fostering greater customer loyalty and a competitive advantage in Vietnam's dynamic market. The study is constructed as follows: following this introduction, a comprehensive literature review establishes the theoretical frameworks (2), which are followed by a detailed research methodology (3), with subsequent sections presenting findings (4), and an in-depth discussion (5), analyzing their implications, and concluding with practical recommendations for F&B businesses. Through this constructed approach, the study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding of customer satisfaction in the F&B industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B Market

Satisfaction reflects the extent to which customer expectations are met, as it depends on a company's product development, quality, service, and continuous improvement to align with those expectations. Customer satisfaction refers to the extent to which a product or service fulfills or surpasses customer expectations (Priest, 1998). Satisfaction is likely not a single emotion but rather a combination of multiple dimensions or feelings (Davidow & Leigh, 1998); however, it can be assessed using various methods, including comparing customer expectations with perceived benefits and costs (Khan et al., 2022; Khairawati, 2020). Customer satisfaction plays an indispensable role in a company's economic performance, especially in the fast-paced F&B industry, as studies have shown that higher customer satisfaction reduces customer

complaints and enhances customer loyalty and usage behavior (Mithas et al., 2005). With the population exceeding 100 million and steadily rising incomes, Vietnam's franchising sector is expected to thrive over the coming years; as a result, major international food and beverage brands such as Starbucks, KFC, and McDonald's are expanding in the country. In this landscape, the F&B industry attracts the largest share of foreign brand franchises, accounting for a notable 50% of the total franchise market (Hoang & Bui, 2025; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). In the early stages of their business, food and beverage franchise managers must recognize culture as a key factor in ensuring success (Hoang & Bui, 2025). For instance, the demand for traditional and locally sourced products has surged, reflecting a cultural pride and preference for genuine, high-quality experiences. Additionally, the rise of digital platforms, such as food delivery apps and online review systems, has made customer satisfaction more transparent and critical for businesses.

In understanding customer satisfaction, the Service-Dominant logic (SDL) of marketing, introduced by Vargo & Lusch (2004), asserts that value is co-created through customer-provider interaction across design, production, delivery, and consumption, with customers defining value rather than it being inherent in the product (Yazdanparast et al., 2010). This perspective provides a valuable lens for understanding how customer satisfaction is co-created through interactions between businesses and customers, stressing the active role of customers in shaping their satisfaction through engagement (e.g., experiences, feedback, participation) with the brand and perceived authenticity of the product. Complementing this, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a psychological perspective, explains how satisfaction is driven by fulfillment of three psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Teixeira et al., 2012). Customers feel more satisfied when they have control over their dining experience (autonomy), perceive their choices as meaningful and valuable (competence), and experience a sense of connection through cultural authenticity and social interactions (relatedness). These motivations are further reinforced by Sensory Marketing Theory, a strategy that leverages experiences stimulated by the five human senses: taste, smell, hearing, sight, and touch (Fong et al., 2023), thereby enhancing emotional engagement and perceived brand value. In the context of Imperial Delicacy, where tradition and premium experience are held as key, the conjunction of these three theories suggests that satisfaction arises when customers actively engage with the brand (SDL), feel personally fulfilled and motivated (SDT), and have an immersive sensory experience that enhances emotional connection (Sensory Marketing Theory). The combination of co-creation, intrinsic motivation, and sensory appeal from these theories provides a holistic understanding of how customers perceive and evaluate their experiences.

Anchoring Theoretical Frameworks

The Role of Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory. Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is considered the fundamental framework in consumer behavior research, which examines how expectations, along with the performance of a product or service, shape customer satisfaction (Hien et al., 2024). The theory suggests that before consuming a product, consumers form expectations based on their previous knowledge, marketing messages, and personal experiences. After using the product, they evaluate their experience against these initial expectations. Three possible outcomes include zero disconfirmation (meets expectations), positive disconfirmation (exceeds expectations), or negative disconfirmation (falls short) (Hossain, 2019). In the Vietnamese F&B market, especially for a premium brand like Imperial Delicacy, product authenticity is an essential factor in shaping customer satisfaction. Consumers drawn to high-quality, traditional, or culturally significant foods have specific authenticity expectations; meeting or surpassing these expectations enhances their satisfaction. On the contrary, any deviations from perceived authenticity can lead to negative

disconfirmation, reducing satisfaction levels. A person may steer clear of a brand if it reflects an undesired identity, a negative reference group, inauthenticity, or a loss of individuality (Lee et al., 2009).

However, Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) assumes that expectations are consistently stable and rationally formed, which often fails to align with the fluid and dynamic nature of consumer behavior (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009). In the F&B industry, subjective perceptions, emotional engagement, and multisensory experiences play a pivotal role in achieving satisfaction, extending beyond the simple expectation-confirmation process. While EDT provides a solid foundation for understanding the relationship between product authenticity and satisfaction, it must be complemented by alternative models that capture the experiential and affective dimensions of consumer behavior.

Experiential Marketing Theory (EMT) and the Moderating Role of Perceived Value in Brand Experience. Experiential Marketing Theory (EMT) explores how sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational experiences shape consumer perceptions and satisfaction (Schmitt, 1999). Unlike traditional transaction-focused marketing, EMT argues that contemporary consumers crave immersive brand experiences that go beyond mere foundational benefits. In the case of Imperial Delicacy, the brand experience is multi-layered, encompassing the sensory allure of its products, the cultural narratives woven into its identity, and the holistic customer journey from discovery to consumption. This aligns with Schmitt's (1999) proposition that successful experiential marketing fosters deep psychological engagement, strengthening brand attachment and elevating customer satisfaction. Crucially, EMT highlights that perceived authenticity, as an integral component of brand experience, deepens emotional connections, thereby elevating consumer satisfaction.

A key contribution of EMT to this study is its ability to integrate perceived value as a moderating factor in the relationship between brand experience and satisfaction. Defined by Zeithaml (1988) as the consumer's assessment of benefits relative to costs, perceived value intensifies the positive impact of brand experience by reinforcing emotional resonance and perceived exclusivity (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For instance, if Imperial Delicacy effectively conveys a premium and culturally rich brand identity, customers who perceive high value will experience greater satisfaction, even at elevated price points. Conversely, for those who assign a lower value to the offering, even a compelling brand experience may not translate into proportionate satisfaction. By capturing this dynamic interplay, EMT offers a more flexible and nuanced approach than traditional satisfaction models that rely solely on expectation-confirmation mechanisms (Brakus et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, EMT presumes that experiential engagement is universally positive, yet in reality, brand experiences are highly subjective and context-dependent. For instance, a consumer unfamiliar with Imperial Delicacy's cultural significance may not derive the same level of experiential fulfillment as an engaged customer with a strong emotional connection to the brand (Creevey et al., 2022).

The Impact of Product Authenticity on Customer Satisfaction

Sculpturing consumer perceptions and behaviors, product authenticity has evolved into an indispensable factor in that mission, particularly in the Food & Beverage (F&B) industry. The concept of "authenticity" is complex and lacks a universally accepted definition, as few authors explicitly define it. It may be related to the reliability and authenticity of service providers, which are essential elements of assurance (Naylor, 2024). It can stem from an object's inherent qualities, arise from its connection to a historical period, organization, or nature, or be assigned by marketers and consumers; in other words, authenticity can be both genuine and/or artificially constructed (Beverland, 2005, 2006). In the F&B sector, authenticity often revolves around the use of traditional recipes, local ingredients, and cultural

practices, while consumers seek authentic experiences for their perceived quality, trustworthiness, and emotional connection (Lu et al., 2015). From a psychological perspective, Swann (1983) explains why authenticity resonates with consumers: individuals seek experiences that validate and reinforce their self-views or sense of identity (Talaifar & Swann, 2017). Similarly, from a sociological perspective, Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) explores how consumers interpret products as symbols of cultural or social meaning, making authenticity a key factor in their purchasing decisions. The term “product authenticity” is relevant in emerging markets like Vietnam, as Vietnamese consumers, particularly in urban areas, have grown more refined in their purchasing habits (Nguyen et al., 2011), given that rapid urbanization and globalization have led to growing demand for products that reflect local heritage and cultural identity. In such markets, authenticity serves as a differentiator, enabling brands to stand out in a crowded marketplace. For instance, studies have shown that consumers are willing to pay a premium for products perceived as authentic, as they associate these products with superior taste, health benefits, and ethical production practices (Ho et al., 2023). This aligns with the principles of Imperial Delicacy, a brand rooted in Vietnamese culinary traditions, as the company places authenticity at the core, aligning with consumer preferences for traditional and high-quality products.

Moreover, product authenticity has been linked to customers, but it still varies across contexts, ranging from strong to neutral or weak. Strong evidence proves that authenticity significantly enhances satisfaction through building trust and emotional connection (Morhart et al., 2015). A study conducted on consumer-based brand authenticity by Napoli & colleagues (2014), for instance, found that authenticity substantially drives customer satisfaction by fostering trust and emotional connection. The study points out that consumers perceive authentic brands as more credible and reliable, which directly contributes to higher satisfaction levels. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as explained earlier, authentic products fulfill these needs by allowing consumers to express their identity (autonomy), feel confident in their choices (competence), and connect with cultural or social values (relatedness); when these needs are met, consumer experience can be set to a stronger satisfaction position. Additionally, the sociological perspective of Symbolic Consumption Theory (Levy, 1999) describes how consumers use products as symbols to express their identity, values, and social status. The embodiment of cultural heritage or traditions in authentic products serves as a powerful symbol of identity and belonging. The theory stresses the idea that when customers buy original products, it is not just for functional purposes but also to express their connection to a particular culture, community, or set of values; by fulfilling the need for self-expression and social integration, this symbolic value enhances their satisfaction.

However, the impact of authenticity is not universal and can vary extensively depending on contextual factors. While numerous studies have shown the strong effect of authenticity on satisfaction among consumers who cherish tradition and heritage, Hume (2010) found the opposite effect among younger consumers, due to their preference for innovation and modernity. This divergence can be articulated through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), which suggests that individuals derive their self-concept from group membership; reflecting younger consumers, who often identify with modern, forward-thinking groups, may value innovation over tradition, whereas older customers may prioritize authenticity to align with their heritage-based identity. In addition, Josiassen (2011) introduced the concept of consumer disidentification, in which individuals actively distance themselves from products and brands that do not align with their identity or cultural values. This demonstrates that when consumers lack the cultural or experiential background to appreciate a product’s authenticity, they are less likely to recognize the meaningfulness behind it, therefore, declining its impact on satisfaction.

Despite the prevailing consensus on the positive influence of authenticity, emerging research indicates that its relationship with customer satisfaction can be limited or even negligible in certain contexts. For instance, Beverland & Farrelly (2010) found that in markets where functional characteristics such as price and convenience dominate consumer decision-making, authenticity exerts little to no impact on satisfaction. As argued by Sirgy (1982), the psychological lens articulated this phenomenon as the alignment between a consumer's self-perception and their perception of a brand or product (Boksberger et al., 2011). Younger consumers, for example, who identify with modern, innovation-driven identities may look at traditional or heritage-based products as incongruent with their self-image, leading them to reject authenticity in favor of alternatives that better reflect their contemporary values. These findings are particularly noticeable and relevant in Vietnam's dynamic F&B market, where brands like Imperial Delicacy face tensions between authenticity demands and shifting consumer preferences. Recent work in Southeast Asia offers a similar insight with a study on Thailand's culinary tourism showing that when diners view local restaurants as genuinely authentic, that perception can trigger self-expansion motives that in turn strengthen customer liking and overall satisfaction (Wareerbor et al., 2025).

By aligning with the pre-consumption cognitive process rooted in cultural and traditional values in the EDT framework, this study adjusts the various perspectives above to reach the first hypothesis as follows:

H1: Product Authenticity has a positive impact on Customer Satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B Market

The Impact of Brand Experience on Customer Satisfaction

At the heart of marketplace perception lies the brand experience, a powerful reflection of what a company truly promises to deliver (Bapat & Williams, 2023). Not only positioning itself as a critical driver of customer satisfaction, but brand experience also profoundly influences consumer perceptions and behaviors, especially in the hectic and highly competitive Food and beverage industry. Since both customers and potential customers engage with the brand in various ways, brand experience is considered a broader concept that encompasses both direct and indirect interactions (Bapat & Kannadhasan, 2022). Brand experience can be defined as the subjective and internal reactions of consumers – encompassing sensations, emotions, and thoughts – along with their behavioral responses triggered by brand-related elements such as design, identity, packaging, communication, and environment (Brakus et al., 2009). In the F&B sector, far more than a mere transaction, brand experience transforms routine interactions into meaningful engagements, deepening emotional connections and long-term loyalty (Nysveen et al., 2013). The idea that brand experience goes beyond simple transactions and evolves into meaningful “emotional milestones” can be highly compelling (Anujan et al., 2024), and to better understand what comes to terms, a few perspectives should be considered. From a psychological standpoint, Flow Theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes a complete and immersive state in which individuals are fully engaged and deeply absorbed in their actions (Rahi et al., 2025), underscoring the importance of crafting experiences that not only capture attention but also evoke positive emotions. Also, the sociological perspective by Arnould & Thompson (2005) discovers how customers co-create the meaning of experiences through firm-produced stimuli, recognizing their vital role in shaping those experiences and stressing how brand experience shapes identity, influences cultural meanings, and integrates into social practices, much like Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Waqas et al., 2021). The theory covers well the necessity of designing experiences that align with consumers' cultural values and social contexts, allowing brands to foster meaningful and authentic connections. In fast-evolving markets like Vietnam, where consumer preferences shift constantly, brand

experience serves as a significant differentiator, evident by studies showing immersive experiences – such as interactive dining and visually striking packaging – enhance engagement and loyalty (Nysveen et al., 2013). Imperial Delicacy illustrates how brands that blend traditional aesthetics with storytelling may foster cultural resonance and emotional connections among Vietnamese consumers, aligning with Schmitt's (1999) framework of experiential marketing.

The link between brand experience and customer satisfaction has been shown to vary from strong to negligible across different circumstances; however, current studies have demonstrated that brand experience can shape customer satisfaction and foster loyalty by fostering meaningful and impactful interactions (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). Extraordinary experiences are characterized by spontaneity, originality, and a deep sense of satisfaction and joy (Wright & Larsen, 2023). Research by Iglesias et al. (2011) reveals that to deliver exceptional brand experiences that drive high customer satisfaction, brands must efficiently manage key areas, such as training and internal communication policies, by prioritizing engaging, memorable interactions. These experiences can encourage positive emotions – such as joy, excitement, and nostalgia – that evolve consumers' overall perception of a brand, reinforcing both satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, the psychological lens of Isen (1984) examines how positive emotions elevate individuals' interest and enjoyment in moderately engaging activities (Isen & Reeve, 2005), similar to how positive emotions generated through brand experiences boost customer satisfaction by creating a favorable emotional state. When consumers associate a brand with positive feelings, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their experience, reinforcing their loyalty and engagement. As stated by Urick (2014), brands act as performers on a social stage, using elements such as store ambiance, packaging, and customer service to craft immersive narratives that leave a lasting and positive impression on consumers. Research by Khan & Fatma (2017) further supports this, showing that experiential consumption – such as interactive brand events and immersive dining – improves satisfaction by bringing a brand's identity to life in ways that captivate and emotionally engage customers. This is also compatible with Nysveen et al. (2013), who advocated that culturally resonant storytelling and visually appealing brand elements significantly strengthen both customer satisfaction and loyalty.

While brand experience is widely regarded as a key driver of customer satisfaction, in some cases, it may have a neutral or minimal effect on consumer satisfaction, particularly when functional benefits or low consumer involvement take precedence. Chitturi et al. (2008) found that in specific markets where consumers prioritize utilitarian benefits (e.g., price and convenience) over hedonic benefits (e.g., experiential, aesthetic), the influence of brand experience on customer satisfaction may be limited. In low-involvement purchase contexts, when consumers spend less time shopping for a brand they recognize than one they are unfamiliar with (Ha & Perks, 2005), they feel less engaged with the brand, leading to a weaker impact of brand experience on satisfaction. Petty & Cacioppo (1986) further support this phenomenon, discovering that consumers process information differently based on their level of involvement. In low-involvement contexts, cognitive and affective brand experiences may have a muted effect, as consumers are less motivated to participate deeply with the brand. Together, these insights highlight that while brand experience can drive satisfaction in many scenarios, its impact can also be restrained in contexts where functional benefits or low involvement prevail, underscoring the importance of understanding consumer priorities and engagement levels.

In Vietnam's F&B market, brands like Imperial Delicacy exemplify the tension between experiential factors and the practical needs of price-sensitive consumers. While the brand's captivating experiences (traditional aesthetics, interactive dining environments, and storytelling) can make customers feel connected through cultural heritage, younger urban

demographics may prefer novelty, convenience, and globalized dining trends over experiential elements. Take fast food, for instance, the rise of global fast-food chains and modernized dining options has shifted consumer preferences toward standardized, quick-service formats that emphasize consistency and familiarity over cultural authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). For brands like Imperial Delicacy, this dynamic necessitates navigating evolving expectations – where experiential strategies risk diminished impact if perceived as incompatible with utilitarian priorities (Chitturi et al., 2008). Recent work from Indonesia adds to this pattern, showing that customer satisfaction in beverage chains rises when brand experience is intense, and customers perceive greater value (Carolin & Berlianto, 2025).

By incorporating cultural-symbolic engagement as an integral dimension of brand experience in the EDT framework, we integrate the perspectives to construct the second hypothesis as follows:

H2: Brand Experience has a positive impact on Customer Satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B Market

The Moderating Role of Perceived Value

While some may argue otherwise, customer-perceived value stands as the foundation of lasting customer loyalty, especially in today's fiercely competitive business landscape (Day, 2002). Perceived value often refers to a consumer's overall evaluation of a product or service's usefulness, determined by weighing perceived benefits against perceived costs (Chen & Chen, 2010). Also, it plays a critical moderating role in the relationship between brand experience and customer satisfaction. While the definition of brand experience usually surrounds sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses provoked by brand-related stimuli, perceived value acts as a lens through which consumers evaluate the worthiness of these experiences. When customers perceive high value in a brand, it can strengthen the link between service or brand experience perception and customer satisfaction (Paulose & Shakeel, 2022); conversely, if low value is perceived, customers are more likely to switch to different competitors to gain greater perceived benefits, which in turn reduces their loyalty (Chang et al., 2009). The value a consumer sees in a product is formed by their own personal benefits and priorities (Day & Crask, 2000), as the concept of perceived value is deeply rooted in Value-Based Theory (Holbrook, 1999), which speculates that value is not an inherent attribute of a product or service. However, instead, it is co-created through the consumer's subjective evaluation of the benefits and sacrifices involved. In the context of brand experience, perceived value serves as a vital filter that influences how consumer interpret and internalize their interactions with a brand. When consumers perceive that the benefits of a brand experience – such as emotional engagement, cultural resonance, or sensory appeal – outweigh the costs (e.g., monetary price, time, or effort), the experience is more likely to result in higher satisfaction. In parallel, Adams (1965) stated that customers seek a balance between the inputs they invest (e.g., money, time) and the outputs they receive (e.g., quality, experience). The more favorable this balance is, the stronger the impact of brand experience and satisfaction will be. Viewing through the Self-Determination Theory, consumers' intrinsic motivation to encounter a brand is influenced by their perception of the value derived from the experience; on the contrary, when perceived value is low, consumers may feel that the experience does not justify the cost, leading to diminished satisfaction despite a potentially positive brand experience.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that perceived value moderates the impact of brand experience on customer satisfaction. The study of Gallarza & Saura (2006), for instance, found that perceived value significantly moderates the relationship between experiential elements and customer satisfaction, especially in the service-oriented industries. Aligning with this finding is Social Exchange Theory (SET) by Blau (1964), positing that

consumers engage in a cost-benefit analysis when evaluating their interactions with a brand. Therefore, when perceived value is high, consumers see brand experience benefits outweigh costs, and satisfaction is enhanced. Conversely, when perceived value is low, costs seem greater than benefits, and satisfaction diminishes. Sharing a common ground is the research by Chen & Tsai (2007), which highlights that perceived value moderates the relationship between experiential elements and customer satisfaction by influencing consumers' emotional and cognitive evaluations. Sirgy (1982) supports this study by suggesting that consumers evaluate brands based on how well they align with their self-concept. That said, when consumers perceive high value in a brand experience, they are more likely to connect it to their identity, enhancing satisfaction. On the other hand, low perceived value can weaken this alignment, driving down satisfaction. This is especially relevant in the case of Imperial Delicacy, where consumers assess the brand based on its reflection of their cultural identity and values.

Although perceived value appears to play a positive moderating role, it may not have the same effect in different contexts. Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo (2007) found that in price-sensitive markets, the moderating role of perceived value is less pronounced, as consumers prioritize functional benefits (e.g., price, convenience) over experiential elements. This finding is consistent with Lindenberg & Steg (2007), which suggests that consumers prioritize different goals – such as hedonic and utilitarian – based on their situational context. When perceived value is high, consumers are more likely to focus on hedonic goals (e.g., enjoyment, cultural connection), driving the impact of brand experience on satisfaction. Conversely, low perceived value occurs when consumers seek utilitarian goals (e.g., cost savings, convenience) at the time of purchase, reducing the impact of experiential factors on satisfaction. For Imperial Delicacy, understanding the moderating role of perceived value can be indispensable for avoiding potential pitfalls and improving customer satisfaction. When consumers associate the brand's cultural and sensory benefits with high value – such as through narratives emphasizing authenticity or tired pricing structures – the positive impact of experiential elements on satisfaction is amplified (Che & Tsai, 2007; Gallarza & Saura, 2006). Digital platforms further shape these perceptions by facilitating interactive engagement, as suggested by Value-Based Theory (Holbrook, 1999). However, in Vietnam's fragmented F&B market, the efficiency of these mechanisms depends on alignment with consumer priorities, which can range from hedonic to utilitarian (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). Evident from Southeast Asia, recent work in Indonesia's fast-food industry also supports this pattern, noting that perceived value plays a central role in shaping both customer satisfaction and their likelihood of remaining loyal (Hafidz & Huriyahnuryi, 2023).

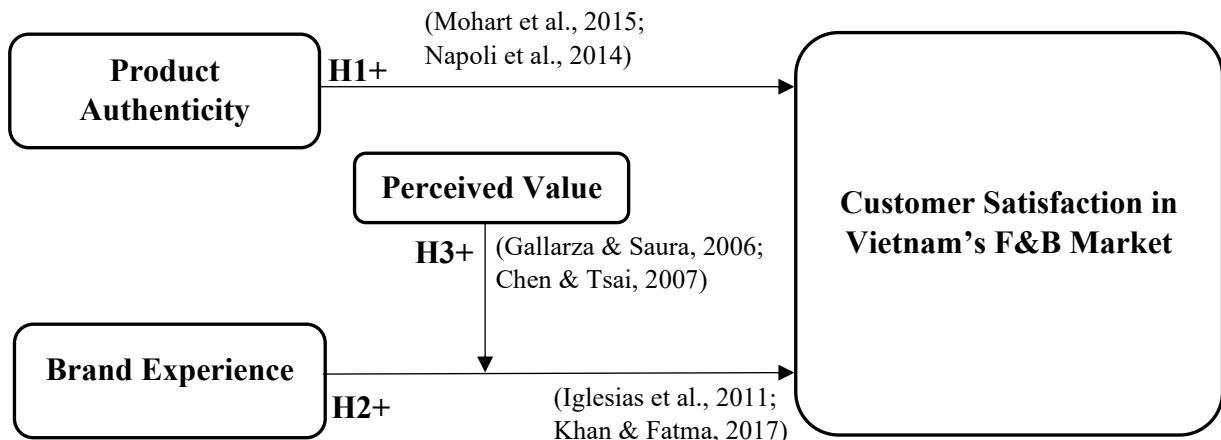
Anchoring the EDT framework, this study therefore incorporates Perceived Value as a moderating factor that strengthens the link between Brand Experience and Customer Satisfaction to reach the second hypothesis as follows:

H3: Perceived Value positively moderates the impact of Brand Experience on Customer Satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B Market

Conceptual Framework

This study brings together two key theories - Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory and Experiential Marketing Theory - to create a complete picture of what drives customer satisfaction. It shows how customers' rational expectations about product authenticity combine with their emotional brand experiences to shape satisfaction, while also revealing how perceived value can strengthen or weaken these connections.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Source: (The authors, 2025)

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Strategy

For this study, a quantitative approach is adopted, as it facilitates the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify and validate trends (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This method employs statistical analysis to objectively evaluate data and derive quantifiable findings (Babbie, 2010). We have selected this approach to address the research questions and explore the connections among critical variables. Furthermore, the study utilizes a deductive methodology, consistent with quantitative research, allowing for hypothesis testing, predictive analysis, and evidence-based conclusions derived from statistical data.

Participants

To ensure precision and representativeness, this study implements probability sampling (Bryman, 2012). Data were gathered via a survey using a 5-point Likert scale, in which respondents indicated their level of agreement from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") (Brown, 2011). A stratified sampling method was used to incorporate varied perspectives, ensuring the sample accurately reflected key demographic segments. The target population was evenly divided into four groups: existing Imperial Delicacy customers, potential customers interested in premium food and beverage (F&B) products, loyal customers and VIP members, and F&B industry professionals and influencers – each constituting 25% of the total sample. Participants were selected from major Vietnamese cities, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang, where Imperial Delicacy has a significant market presence.

Existing customers provided insights into satisfaction, product authenticity, and brand experience, while potential customers helped evaluate how brand experience affects perceived value and satisfaction. Loyal customers and VIP members contributed perspectives on the long-term effects of brand experience, whereas industry experts assessed the role of product authenticity in customer satisfaction. After stratification, a simple random sample of 385 respondents from each group was drawn to ensure unbiased selection. Surveys were distributed both in-person at Imperial Delicacy's flagship stores and partner restaurants and online via industry networks, customer databases, and digital platforms. This approach ensures a robust

dataset reflecting consumer perceptions of authenticity, brand experience, perceived value, and satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B sector.

FINDINGS

Reliability Analysis

Based on Table 1, all dependent variables had adjusted item-total correlation coefficients of at least 0.3. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.715, surpassing the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.7 and exceeding the alpha values that would result if any individual item were excluded. Furthermore, for each dependent variable, the Cronbach's alpha remained consistently higher than the corresponding adjusted item-total correlations, even after the removal of individual items. As a result, no items were excluded. Comparable findings were observed in the Cronbach's alpha values for the other variables as well.

Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha of the Dependent Variable “Customer Satisfaction”

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.715	4

Item-Total Statistics				
Scale	Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
CS1	8.426	9.647	.517	.672
CS2	9.623	10.960	.565	.569
CS3	7.655	10.728	.639	.697
CS4	10.038	9.981	.690	.703

Where CS1, CS2, CS3, and CS4 are coded for survey questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of customer satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B market, respectively. *Source: (The authors, 2025)*

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Where PA1 to PA4, BE1 to BE4, PV1 to PV4 are coded for survey questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of production authenticity, brand experience, and perceived value, respectively.

According to Table 2, the rotated component matrix categorized the sixteen observed variables into four distinct factors that align with the dependent, the corresponding independent variables, and the moderator. Notably, none of them were excluded during this process. Each demonstrated a factor loading exceeding 0.5.

Table 2
Loading Factors Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix^a			
Component with loading factors			
1	2	3	4
CS1 .516	PA1 .543	BE1 .768	PV1 .622
CS2 .604	PA2 .662	BE2 .757	PV2 .600
CS3 .623	PA3 .685	BE3 .720	PV3 .655
CS4 .598	PA4 .594	BE4 .616	PV4 .544

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Where PA1 to PA4, BE1 to BE4, PV1 to PV4 are coded for survey questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of production authenticity, brand experience, and perceived value, respectively.

Source: (The authors, 2025)

Linear Regression Model

Table 3 indicates that the significance values (Sig.) from the t-tests for both variables are 0.000, which is well below the standard threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. This result confirms that the independent variables, production authenticity (PA) and brand experience (BE), have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, customer satisfaction in Vietnam's F&B Market (CS). As a result, both hypotheses are supported.

Table 3
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant) 8.652	.763		3.791	.000
	PA .714	.562	.660	3.465	.000
	BE .635	.888	.610	4.667	.000

^aDependent Variable: CS

Where CS: mean of CS1, CS2, CS3, CS4; PA: mean of PA1, PA2, PA3, PA4;
Source: (The authors, 2025)

Moderator Analysis

As shown in Table 4, the p-value for the interaction term (Int_1) is 0.000, which is significantly below the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates a meaningful interaction between brand experience (BE) and perceived value (PV) in predicting customer satisfaction

in Vietnam's F&B Market (CS). The interaction coefficient of 0.650 suggests that higher levels of perceived value enhance the positive effect of BE on CS. Hence, hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

Table 4
Moderator results analysis

Model : 1 Y: CS X: BE W: PV Sample Size: 385

OUTCOME VARIABLE: CS

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dl1	dl2	p
.684	.468	.357	5.482	3.000	381.000	.000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4.998	.235	76.323	.000	5.342	5.121
BE	.537	.275	3.765	.000	.251	.287
PV	.638	.444	4.803	.000	.211	.208
Int_1	.650	.373	4.889	.000	.394	.366

Where **PV**: mean of PV1, PV2, PV3, PV4. *Source: (The authors, 2025)*

DISCUSSION

Summary Results

The linear regression results show that product authenticity (PA) has a stronger impact on customer satisfaction (CS), with a coefficient of 0.66. Meanwhile, brand experience (BE) also plays a vital role but has a slightly lower influence, as indicated by a coefficient of 0.61. Additionally, perceived value (PV) serves as a moderating variable, exerting a moderate influence on the relationship between brand experience and customer satisfaction, with a moderation coefficient of 0.65.

Theoretical Implications

The study's robust findings ($\beta = 0.66$) provide evidence supporting the positive impact of product authenticity (PA) on customer satisfaction (CS), reinforcing the arguments (Morhart

et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014) that prove authenticity serves a critical driver of customer satisfaction by fostering trust and emotional connections. This relationship is particularly pronounced in culturally rich markets like Vietnam, where traditional values play a significant role in consumer decision-making. The results align well with Self-Determination Theory from earlier, as PA satisfies fundamental psychological needs for autonomy (through self-expression) and relatedness (through cultural belonging). Additionally, evidence from regional studies, most notably in Thailand, lends further theoretical weight to this. Recent work in Thailand's culinary tourism shows that when visitors perceive an experience as truly authentic, it activates self-expansion motives, meaning people are drawn to seek out novelty, personal development, and deeper cultural understanding through those encounters (Wareerbor et al., 2025). This process fosters stronger emotional bonds with the experience and markedly increases overall satisfaction. Far from being limited to established trust, authenticity therefore serves a richer psychological role. The Thao example offers a valuable comparative perspective, illustrating that across Southeast Asia, authenticity functions not merely as a marker of cultural legitimacy but as an important channel for personal and identity-related growth. However, the study offers only partial support for Beverland & Farrelly's (2010) connection that PAs' influence diminishes in markets dominated by functional attributes. While this may hold for commoditized products, Imperial Delicacy's premium positioning appears to amplify PA's impact. The findings directly challenge Hume's (2010) perspective regarding younger consumers' preferences, suggesting that even younger demographics in Vietnam maintain a strong appreciation for authentic experiences when they are well-executed and culturally relevant. This generational nuance indicates that while PA remains a potent driver of satisfaction, its presentation and framing must adapt to the evolving expectations of different consumer segments.

The significant coefficient of the positive impact of brand experience (BE) on customer satisfaction (CS) ($\beta = 0.61$) strongly validates the experiential marketing paradigm advocated by Brakus et al. (2009) and Schmitt (1999), demonstrating BE's capacity to elevate satisfaction through multi-sensory engagement and emotional resonance. Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) offers a particularly insightful explanation for these results, as Imperial Delicacy's immersive dining experiences appear to foster the state of complete absorption and enjoyment that characterizes optimal experiences. Additionally, evidence from Indonesia lends further support to this view. A recent study on local beverage chains in the country demonstrates that brand experience plays a key role in boosting customer satisfaction, primarily by heightening emotional value and fostering deeper cognitive involvement (Carolin & Berlianto, 2025). This finding sits comfortably within the Consumer Experience Framework, which argues that experiential elements like store atmosphere, visual branding, and interactive service encounters trigger both affective and sensory responses that, in turn, directly influence satisfaction levels. These Indonesian results combined suggest that the power of brand experience in Southeast Asia stems not only from cultural factors but also from fundamental psychological processes through which consumers interpret and internalize experiential signals. The research partially supports Chitturi et al.'s (2008) cautionary perspective about BE's limitations in low-involvement contexts, though it suggests this boundary condition may be less absolute than previously thought. Even in Vietnam's price-sensitive market segments, carefully crafted brand experiences that deliver clear value can overcome purely utilitarian considerations. The results imply that while BE's impact is indeed context-dependent, its potential to enhance satisfaction extends beyond premium segments when properly executed, aligning with local consumer expectations and market realities.

The significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.65$) confirms how positive the impact of perceived value (PV) on the link between brand experience (BE) and customer satisfaction (CS), supporting arguments about PV's crucial role in strengthening the impact of BE (Gallarza

& Saura, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007). This finding is particularly relevant in Vietnam's emerging market context, where consumers are increasingly sophisticated but remain value-conscious. The results align with Adams (1965), demonstrating how consumers perform careful mental accounting of experiential benefits against their costs. Adding depth to this view, regional evidence from Indonesia's fast-food industry found that PV plays a key role in driving both customer satisfaction and loyalty, primarily by boosting consumers' sense of fairness and the overall worth of the experience they receive (Hafidz & Huriyahnyi, 2023) and resonating closely with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which contends that when people recognize substantial value in an exchange, the cognitive and affective rewards of the experience are magnified, leading to a stronger satisfaction. With the Indonesian context, then, PV emerges not simply as a judgmental lens but more as a powerful experiential amplifier that intensifies the psychological effects of BE. While the study partially upholds Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo's (2007) observation that PV's role is reduced in price-driven markets, it reveals important nuances: PV's moderating influence persists even in cost-sensitive segments, though its strength varies. This challenges Lindenberg & Steg's (2007) more categorical assertion about utilitarian goals overriding PV's influence, suggesting instead that the relationship operates on a continuum. The findings highlight PV's role as both an amplifier of positive experiences and a shield against negative ones, making it a critical strategic lever for F&B brands operating in Vietnam's competitive and rapidly evolving market landscape.

Practical Implications

The study reveals that product authenticity substantially influences customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.66$) in Vietnam's F&B sector, reinforcing its critical role in shaping consumer perceptions (Napoli et al., 2014; Morhart et al., 2015). Given the growing preference among Vietnamese consumers for culturally authentic experiences (Nguyen et al., 2011), Imperial Delicacy should double down on showcasing its traditional recipes, locally-sourced ingredients, and cultural roots in its branding. This ties into Self-Determination Theory by tapping into customers' desire for self-expression and cultural connection. Practical measures might involve crafting engaging narratives around ingredient origins and traditional preparation techniques to underscore the brand's authenticity (Beverland, 2005).

Another key takeaway is the strong influence of brand experience ($\beta = 0.61$), proving that memorable, multi-sensory interactions matter (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). Imperial Delicacy could revamp its restaurants to blend Vietnamese heritage with modern touches, appealing to younger crowds (Nysveen et al., 2013). For instance, augmented reality menus could provide diners with historical insights into each dish, blending tradition with innovation. Additionally, training staff to share cultural knowledge during service could deepen emotional connections with customers (Iglesias et al., 2011), fostering the immersive experiences described by Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Finally, the study further underscores the role of perceived value ($\beta = 0.65$) in strengthening these relationships, suggesting the need for strategic pricing approaches (Gallarza & Saura, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Imperial Delicacy could offer tiered dining experiences, such as premium dining experiences with chef interactions, to better convey the worth of its offerings. Loyalty programs granting access to exclusive cultural activities—like cooking classes with local experts—could also enhance perceived value by balancing cost with memorable benefits, as implied by Adams (1965). And with a strong social media presence, they could amplify their authentic brand story and boost engagement (Holbrook, 1999). By combining these strategies, Imperial Delicacy can stay ahead in Vietnam's fast-changing F&B scene while meeting evolving customer demands.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that are worth considering. First, the exclusive use of quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) may overlook subtle consumer perspectives that qualitative research could reveal—particularly in a culturally diverse market like Vietnam. Second, focusing solely on Imperial Delicacy's premium clientele may limit the applicability of the findings to mass-market F&B brands, where practical factors such as affordability and convenience often take precedence (Chitturi et al., 2008). Third, the cross-sectional design makes it difficult to establish causality; a longitudinal approach would provide a clearer picture of how consumer preferences evolve. Although the model clearly uncovers meaningful connections between product authenticity, brand experience, perceived value, and customer satisfaction, its reliance on a single point-in-time dataset prevents it from tracking how those links might strengthen, weaken, or shift as consumer preferences evolve. In Vietnam's fast-changing food and beverage scene, powered by rising incomes, global influences, shifting generational values, and the surge of digital ordering and review platforms, the very ideas of what counts as "genuine" or what creates a strong, emotional brand connection can shift noticeably from one year to the next, or even faster. Without data collected over an extended period or from the same customers repeatedly, the research cannot show whether the relationships it found are durable, follow seasonal or cyclical patterns, or could break down under sudden economic pressures, cultural changes, or viral social-media trends. Fourth, the study did not fully account for regional differences within Vietnam, such as contrasting urban and rural consumer behaviors, which could influence perceptions of authenticity and brand experience (de Mooij, & Hofstede, 2011). Prior studies highlight that consumers in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines often react quite differently to ideas of authenticity, cultural meanings, brand experiences, and perceived value (Timokhina et al., 2015). As most research examines these issues in isolated national contexts rather than comparing them side by side, it remains unclear how far the results truly apply across borders, especially in Southeast Asia, where cultures share notable similarities yet economies differ markedly. Incorporating data or findings from several countries in the region would strengthen the ability to generalize the conclusions and offer a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how authenticity-based marketing performs in culturally proximate yet economically diverse settings. Collectively, the given limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with care when applied to other segments of the F&B industry.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should build on this study's findings, address its limitations, and explore new developments in Vietnam's evolving F&B sector. One promising direction would be longitudinal studies examining how shifting consumer preferences—such as growing interest in fusion cuisine or digital food delivery ecosystems—affect the long-term viability of authenticity-focused branding. Comparative studies across Southeast Asian markets could also reveal whether these findings apply in different cultural and economic contexts (Timokhina et al., 2015). Researchers might also investigate generational differences, particularly how younger consumers' appetite for innovation balances with traditional values (Hume, 2010)—insights that could help Imperial Delicacy refine its customer engagement. Finally, incorporating neuroscientific approaches, like sensory marketing experiments, might reveal unconscious factors influencing brand perception and satisfaction (Fong et al., 2023). These research avenues would not only strengthen theoretical understanding but also pave the way for practical guidance for F&B brands operating in increasingly dynamic markets.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the critical interplay between product authenticity, brand experience, and perceived value in driving customer satisfaction within Vietnam's dynamic F&B market. The findings demonstrate that authenticity ($\beta = 0.66$) is a foundational pillar of consumer trust, while immersive brand experiences ($\beta = 0.61$) foster meaningful emotional connections that transcend transactional relationships. The moderating role of perceived value ($\beta = 0.65$) further reveals how consumers evaluate these elements through a cost-benefit lens, emphasizing the need for strategic alignment between quality offerings and pricing structures.

For Imperial Delicacy, these insights present a roadmap for sustainable competitive advantage. By doubling down on its cultural heritage through authentic storytelling and locally-sourced ingredients, while simultaneously elevating customer experiences through innovative, multi-sensory engagements, the brand can solidify its market position. The integration of digital platforms and value-driven loyalty programs offers additional avenues to deepen consumer relationships in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Beyond practical implications, this research contributes to marketing theory by bridging Expectancy-Confirmation and Experiential Marketing frameworks in an emerging market context. It challenges conventional wisdom about younger consumers' preferences by demonstrating their appreciation for well-executed traditional experiences when coupled with modern elements.

As Vietnam's F&B landscape continues to evolve, brands that master this balance between authenticity and innovation, between cultural preservation and contemporary relevance, will be best positioned for long-term success. Imperial Delicacy's journey offers valuable lessons for premium F&B brands navigating similar markets - proving that in an age of globalization, cultural authenticity paired with exceptional experiences remains an unbeatable formula for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Future research should explore how these dynamics play out across different consumer segments and product categories, further refining our understanding of these critical relationships in emerging markets.

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