



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Evaluating the quality of culinary tourism: Challenges and consumer perceptions

Putri Indah Husnul Khotimah^{1*}, Marcella Claresta Wahjudi¹, and Nanda Syhalom Ramli¹

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this research is to understand consumer perceptions and identify challenges in maintaining service quality in culinary tourism. It focuses on the challenges faced at Kopi Klotok, a culinary tourism destination.

Methodology/Design/Approach - The study uses a qualitative approach, employing a literature study method to review academic journals and previous research on culinary tourism and quality management. Additionally, secondary data is analyzed from online review platforms such as social media and Google Reviews. The research also includes direct observation of the existing service process at Kopi Klotok.

Finding - The study identifies several challenges that affect service quality, such as inconsistent service during peak hours, limited seating capacity, and long waiting times. These issues negatively impact the customer experience. The secondary data analysis also reveals that while consumers perceive traditional environments as offering authentic experiences, overcrowding and inadequate service management can disrupt this perception.

Originality/Value - This research highlights the importance of operational efficiency and service consistency in maintaining customer satisfaction in culinary tourism. It emphasizes the need for effective service management to address the challenges faced during peak times and ensure a positive customer experience.

Keywords: Kopi Klotok, Culinary tourism, Service quality, Google Reviews, Social media

Introduction

Culinary tourism has become an important component of contemporary tourism because food is not only consumed to satisfy physiological needs but also experienced as part of place, culture, identity, and memory. Recent research on memorable gastro-tourism experiences shows that sensory and authentic experiences, local culture, servicescape, social interaction, novelty, meaningfulness, and hospitable service can jointly shape memorable food-related tourism experiences (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). In Indonesia, culinary experience quality has also been associated with culinary-experience satisfaction and destination-experience satisfaction, indicating that the quality of food-related experiences can contribute to broader evaluations of a tourism destination (Widjaja et al., 2020).

Within this context, culinary destinations are evaluated through a combination of tangible and intangible attributes. Food quality remains important, but visitors also respond to service encounters, atmosphere, price, physical facilities, accessibility, and the authenticity of the consumption setting. Research using tourists' online reviews has identified food quality, service, ambience, and price fairness as recurring attributes in evaluations of local food experiences (Sangkaewa et al., 2025). Similarly, netnographic research demonstrates that authenticity, atmospherics, culinary attraction, engagement, and service quality can contribute to

*Correspondence:

Putri Indah Husnul Khotimah

putriindahhusnulkhotimah@gmail.com

Department of Tourism, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo STIPRAM Yogyakarta, Indonesia

204-212



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memorable tourism experiences (Saleem & Umar, 2023). These findings are particularly relevant to culinary businesses that deliberately create a traditional or rural atmosphere because the physical environment becomes part of the product being evaluated.

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Kopi Klotok in Yogyakarta provides an appropriate case for examining this issue. The establishment is associated with traditional Javanese food, coffee, a rural setting, and a deliberately simple dining environment. Previous studies of Kopi Klotok have examined service quality, store atmosphere, memorable culinary experiences, experiential marketing, and consumers' intention to revisit (Brahmanto, 2024; Novily, 2021; Rahayu & Yusuf, 2021; Sembiring, 2021). These studies indicate that the appeal of Kopi Klotok extends beyond the menu itself. The atmosphere and the overall experience are important components of how visitors evaluate the destination. Consequently, maintaining quality at Kopi Klotok requires attention to both the authenticity that attracts visitors and the operational systems needed to accommodate visitor demand.

The growth of visitor demand, however, can create a quality paradox. The characteristics that make a culinary destination attractive—its popularity, distinctive atmosphere, and high visitor volume—can simultaneously generate congestion, queues, pressure on facilities, and greater demands on employees. At Kopi Klotok, previous research has identified service quality, product, price, place, and atmosphere as relevant factors in consumer satisfaction and repeat-visit intentions (Mayora, 2018; Novily, 2021; Sembiring, 2021). Long waiting times and facility limitations are also visible in the user-generated content examined in this study. From a tourism-management perspective, these issues matter because a memorable culinary experience can contain both positive and negative elements; service failures or excessive waiting may weaken otherwise positive perceptions of food and atmosphere.

Accordingly, this study addresses three questions: (1) how is the quality of culinary tourism at Kopi Klotok perceived by consumers; (2) what challenges are associated with maintaining that quality; and (3) which aspects of the experience are most consistently represented as strengths or weaknesses in publicly available consumer reviews and direct observation? The study aims to provide a qualitative, experience-oriented assessment of Kopi Klotok rather than a statistical measurement of consumer satisfaction. By integrating literature, user-generated content, and observation, the study seeks to clarify how food, service, facilities, atmosphere, authenticity, and operational efficiency interact in the evaluation of a culinary tourism destination.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine culinary tourism quality at Kopi Klotok. Three complementary sources of evidence were used: (1) a literature study to establish the conceptual basis of culinary tourism and service quality; (2) secondary analysis of publicly available user-generated content; and

(3) systematic direct observation of the service environment. The three sources were interpreted together so that consumer narratives could be considered alongside existing research and observed service conditions.

Literature study

The literature study was used to identify concepts relevant to culinary tourism experience quality, including food quality, service quality, atmosphere or servicescape, authenticity, consumer satisfaction, and memorable experience. The literature consisted of academic articles, previous studies, and books relevant to culinary tourism and hospitality service quality. Recent literature emphasizes that memorable gastro-tourism experiences are multidimensional and may include authenticity, sensory experience, local culture, servicescape, interaction, and hospitable service (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). Research specifically concerned with Indonesian gastronomy also demonstrates the relationship between culinary-experience quality and visitor satisfaction (Widjaja et al., 2020). This literature was therefore used as an interpretive framework rather than as a separate empirical dataset.

Secondary data analysis

Secondary data consisted of publicly available consumer-generated content concerning Kopi Klotok, particularly Google Reviews, Instagram, and TikTok. The material was examined for recurring positive and negative evaluations concerning food, service, atmosphere, waiting time, facilities, price, and overall experience. Online reviews are useful for tourism research because they capture visitor-generated evaluations and can reveal experiential attributes that may not be apparent from promotional information. Prior research has demonstrated the usefulness of user-generated content and netnography for examining authenticity, atmospherics, service quality, and memorable tourism experiences (Saleem & Umar, 2023). In this study, the online material was treated as qualitative evidence of expressed perceptions rather than as a statistically representative sample of all Kopi Klotok visitors.

Systematic direct observation

Direct observation focused on the visible service process and visitor environment, including employee–customer interaction, food presentation, seating conditions, cleanliness, queue conditions, and the general physical atmosphere. Observation was used to contextualize the issues appearing in online reviews. The analytical focus was organized around six recurring dimensions: (1) food and beverage quality; (2) service performance; (3) waiting and queue management; (4) facilities and accessibility; (5) atmosphere and authenticity; and (6) environmental management. The interpretation was thematic, with attention to recurring patterns across the three sources of evidence.

Because the study relies partly on publicly available online reviews and the original manuscript does not report a fixed number of reviews, a defined collection period, or a formal coding protocol, the findings should be interpreted as an exploratory qualitative assessment rather than a representative measurement of the entire customer population. The screenshots presented in the manuscript are used illustratively, and identifying information is obscured. A future study could strengthen the evidence by specifying the review-collection period, sample size, inclusion and exclusion criteria, coding procedures, and inter-coder reliability, or by combining review analysis with interviews or a structured survey.

Discussion

Challenges faced by Kopi Klotok in maintaining its culinary tourism quality

The first challenge concerns consistency in food and beverage quality under conditions of high demand. Kopi Klotok's appeal is closely associated with traditional dishes and a simple, home-style culinary concept. The menu includes items such as sayur lodeh, tempe garit, omelette, and kopi tubruk, which are experienced not simply as products but as elements of a traditional dining encounter. Previous research on Kopi Klotok has linked product quality and service quality with consumer satisfaction (Sembiring, 2021), while research on memorable culinary experiences suggests that sensory and authentic dimensions are central to how visitors remember food tourism experiences (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). As visitor volume increases,

however, the need to serve large numbers of customers may create pressure on preparation, presentation, and service consistency. The managerial challenge is therefore to increase operational capacity without weakening the characteristics that visitors perceive as authentic.

A second challenge concerns physical capacity and supporting facilities. The rural setting is part of Kopi Klotok's experiential appeal, yet limited seating, parking capacity, and other visitor facilities can become sources of inconvenience when demand is high. The tension is not simply between "traditional" and "modern" facilities; rather, it concerns whether the available facilities are sufficient to support a comfortable experience while preserving the character of the place. Online consumer comments examined in the study repeatedly draw attention to waiting and parking problems. These observations are consistent with research showing that food-related tourism experiences are shaped by servicescape and atmosphere as well as by the food itself (Saleem & Umar, 2023). Facility limitations therefore have implications beyond physical convenience because they can affect visitors' overall interpretation of service quality.

Human-resource management represents a third challenge. High visitor volume increases the need for employees who can provide consistent, responsive, and courteous service. In restaurant settings, interactions with employees are a visible part of the customer experience, and previous research on Kopi Klotok has identified perceived service quality as an important component of consumer evaluation (Novily, 2021). When employees operate under sustained pressure, delays or inconsistent communication can become more noticeable to customers. Consequently, staff training should address not only technical tasks but also queue communication, complaint handling, hospitality, and coordination between food preparation and front-of-house service. The objective is not to standardize the interaction into a generic restaurant model, but to ensure that the distinctive informal character of Kopi Klotok remains compatible with reliable service delivery.

The fourth challenge is maintaining the atmosphere and environmental conditions that constitute part of Kopi Klotok's identity. Visitors are attracted by the rural setting, traditional décor, open environment, and relaxed atmosphere. Previous research has shown that store atmosphere can influence emotional responses and repeat-purchase decisions in the Kopi Klotok context (Mayora, 2018). At the same time, increasing visitor numbers can place pressure on cleanliness, waste management, parking, circulation, and the overall sense of calm. This creates a central managerial tension: the destination must accommodate demand without allowing congestion and inadequate environmental management to undermine the very atmosphere that attracts visitors. Environmental management should therefore be treated as part of experience quality rather than as a separate operational issue.

Consumer perceptions of the quality offered by Kopi Klotok

Consumer perceptions of Kopi Klotok are strongly connected to the relationship between traditional food, atmosphere, and authenticity. The Google Reviews presented in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how visitors communicate their experiences through short evaluations and photographs. The reviews include positive comments concerning food taste, atmosphere, presentation, and the overall feeling of spending time in a traditional setting. This type of user-generated content is important because online reviews can influence how prospective consumers interpret tourism and hospitality experiences. More broadly, online-review research shows that consumers use such platforms to evaluate and communicate attributes of tourism products and services (Saleem & Umar, 2023).

The Google Reviews indicate three recurring dimensions of positive perception. First, food and beverage are evaluated in relation to taste and the distinctive character of the menu. Second, atmosphere is frequently associated with comfort, simplicity, and a traditional or rural setting. Third, the overall experience is evaluated as a combination of food and place rather than as a meal alone. This pattern is consistent with the wider culinary-tourism literature, which treats gastronomy as an experiential and cultural component of destination consumption. In the Indonesian context, culinary-experience quality has been shown to influence satisfaction with both the culinary experience and the destination experience (Widjaja et al., 2020).



Figure 1. Results of Kopi Klotok visitor reviews on Google Reviews

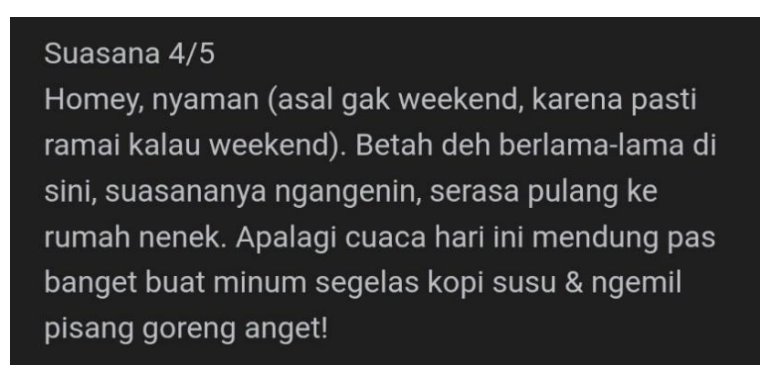


Figure 2. Results of Kopi Klotok visitor reviews on Google Review

The reviews also suggest that positive perceptions do not automatically imply an absence of service problems. Some visitors appreciate the food and atmosphere while simultaneously reporting long waits or crowded conditions. This distinction is important because overall evaluations may contain multiple dimensions that move in different directions. A visitor can regard the culinary concept as authentic and enjoyable while considering the waiting process inefficient. Therefore, consumer perception should not be reduced to a single positive or negative judgment; it is better understood as a multidimensional assessment of food, service, atmosphere, facilities, and value.

The Instagram and TikTok material shown in Figures 3 and 4 provides additional evidence of this multidimensional perception. Visual and narrative content emphasizes the rural environment, rice-field views, traditional food, and the distinctive setting. Such content can strengthen destination visibility because

visitors themselves become distributors of the experience through photographs, videos, and comments. At the same time, user-generated content also exposes operational weaknesses to prospective visitors. This dual function is important for culinary destinations: digital word-of-mouth can reinforce authenticity and attractiveness, but it can also amplify complaints about waiting times, parking, or overcrowding.

The negative comments in the social-media material are particularly relevant to service-quality management. Complaints concerning long waiting times during weekends or holidays indicate a mismatch between demand and operational capacity. Previous research specifically examining Kopi Klotok through SERVQUAL and QFD also highlights customer-satisfaction assessment as a useful approach for identifying service attributes that require improvement (Hutagalung et al., 2023). In the present study, waiting time should therefore be interpreted not merely as a logistical problem but as an experience-quality issue: the longer visitors wait without adequate information or queue management, the greater the possibility that the perceived value of the overall visit will decline.

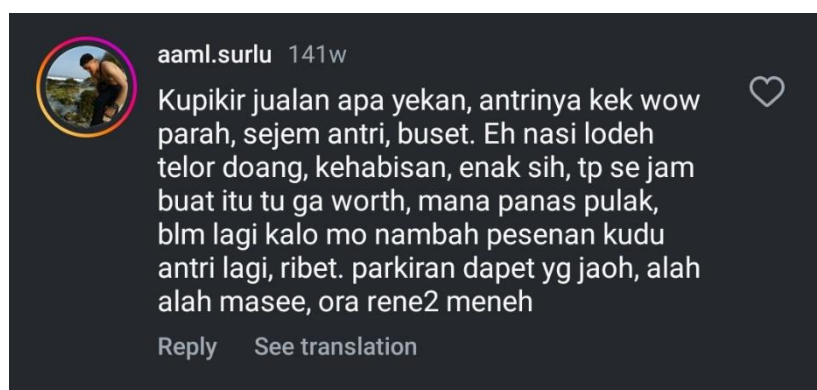


Figure 3. Visitor comments on Instagram

The Instagram comment shown in Figure 3 illustrates a visitor expressing frustration with the waiting and purchasing process. Although one comment cannot represent all visitors, it provides a concrete example of how operational inconvenience can enter the public narrative surrounding a culinary destination. The presence of such comments alongside positive evaluations reinforces the need to distinguish between the attractiveness of the core culinary concept and the effectiveness of its delivery system.



Figure 4. Visitor comments on TikTok

Facility limitations, particularly parking and seating capacity, constitute another recurring concern. The issue is especially relevant during peak periods, when demand exceeds the comfortable capacity of the existing physical environment. From the consumer perspective, inadequate facilities can affect perceived convenience, value, and service quality even when the food itself is positively evaluated. Thus, facility management should be integrated into culinary-tourism quality management rather than treated as an external infrastructure issue.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Kopi Klotok possesses a strong experiential proposition based on traditional food, rural atmosphere, and perceived authenticity, but the proposition is vulnerable when visitor demand produces congestion and service delays. This finding is consistent with recent research that identifies food quality, service, ambience, and price fairness as interconnected attributes of local-gastronomy experiences (Sangkaewa et al., 2025). It also supports the argument that authenticity is not created by food

alone; it is experienced through the combined interaction of the product, setting, service process, and surrounding environment. For Kopi Klotok, maintaining quality therefore requires protecting the distinctive atmosphere while improving the operational conditions under which that atmosphere is experienced.

Integrated interpretation and managerial implications

The findings indicate that culinary tourism quality at Kopi Klotok can be understood as an integrated experience system. Food quality provides the core attraction, authenticity gives the experience cultural and symbolic meaning, the rural atmosphere creates a distinctive servicescape, and service operations determine whether visitors can access these attributes comfortably. The main managerial issue is therefore not to replace the traditional concept with a more standardized restaurant model, but to strengthen the operational infrastructure surrounding it. Priority areas include clearer queue and waiting-time management, better communication with visitors during peak periods, continuous staff training, improved coordination between kitchen and service personnel, and systematic management of parking, seating, cleanliness, and waste. These measures can support the consistency of the visitor experience without necessarily reducing the distinctive character of Kopi Klotok. The implication is also relevant to culinary destinations more broadly: authenticity and operational efficiency should be treated as complementary rather than competing objectives.

Conclusion

This study examined the quality of culinary tourism at Kopi Klotok through a qualitative combination of literature, publicly available user-generated content, and direct observation. The findings show that visitors value Kopi Klotok primarily for its traditional culinary offerings, rural atmosphere, distinctive setting, and perceived authenticity. These attributes form the experiential foundation of the destination and help explain its appeal as a culinary tourism site in Yogyakarta.

At the same time, the study identifies several challenges that can weaken the overall experience. Long waiting times, limited seating and parking capacity, service pressure during peak periods, and environmental-management demands appear as recurring concerns. Importantly, these issues do not necessarily negate the positive perception of the food and atmosphere. Rather, they demonstrate that culinary tourism quality is multidimensional: strong food and authenticity can coexist with weaknesses in service delivery and physical capacity.

The study therefore recommends strengthening queue and capacity management, improving staff training and service coordination, and maintaining cleanliness and environmental quality while preserving the traditional atmosphere that visitors value. For future research, the evidence base should be expanded through a transparent and systematic collection of online reviews, interviews with visitors and employees, and/or a structured survey. Future studies could also compare peak and off-peak periods to examine how visitor density changes perceptions of service quality and authenticity. Because the present study does not provide a statistically representative sample of visitors, its findings should be understood as exploratory evidence that identifies key themes for further investigation.

Acknowledgment

Not applicable.

Declaration

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this work.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work the author used Grammarly in order to correct spelling mistakes and help me make better sentences. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Author contributions

PIHK Conceptualization, Writing –original draft, Writing –review and editing. MCW Methodology, Validation, Writing –review & editing. NSR Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing –review & editing. MCW Supervision, Project administration, Writing –review & editing.

Funding

Not applicable.

Author detail

¹Department of Tourism, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo STIPRAM Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Received: 07 November 2024

Accepted: 18 April 2025

Published online: 18 April 2025

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