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The Impact of Sensory Strategies on the Perception of Authenticity in Ethnic Restaurants

A case study of Iranian restaurants in London, UK

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
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Abstract

The evolution of ethnic restaurants is linked to historical patterns of travel and immigration. Initially emerging as a solution for travellers seeking familiar flavours, ethnic restaurants have evolved into significant players in the modern culinary landscape, offering unique dining experiences. Visiting ethnic restaurants often stems from a desire to immerse oneself in another culture, and an authentic experience is believed to enhance satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. Additionally, the impact of sensory elements on diners' experiences is a topic of growing interest, with significant implications for the hospitality industry. Despite the expanding body of research in this field, they are primarily one-dimensional and do not incorporate a comprehensive multi-sensory perspective. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates how restaurateurs design and apply sensory elements to convey authenticity and how diners perceive these efforts in Iranian restaurants in London.

Employing a qualitative approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 diners with equal numbers of Iranian and non-Iranian individuals, using quota sampling, and 9 restaurateurs to develop an in-depth understanding of their opinions, perceptions, and expectations. Furthermore, non-participant observations were conducted in the restaurants to develop their sensory profiles.

The findings indicate that the stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity tend to be fluid and influenced by personal experiences and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, while restaurateurs recognise the importance of sensory elements, their strategic use to enhance perceptions of authenticity is often lacking. Elements such as restaurant signage, interior design, menu presentation, and auditory cues like ethnic music significantly contribute to the authenticity of the experience. Conversely,

clichéd cultural decorations and non-ethnic menu items can undermine these perceptions.

The research results in the formulation of a conceptual framework synthesizing the findings, which underscores the subjective nature of authenticity and the influence of individual backgrounds and prior experiences. This framework reveals the complex link between sensory elements and perceived authenticity in ethnic restaurants, thereby offering profound insights for both researchers and restaurateurs.

Key words:

Ethnic restaurant, Authenticity, Human five senses

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The presence of ethnic restaurants is closely linked with the history of people's travel and immigration, and it is believed that the first-ever restaurant in history was an 'ethnic restaurant' established circa 1100 A.D., which emerged due to the needs of Chinese businessmen who were not accustomed to the local foods of their business destinations (Rawson and Shore, 2019). The story of ethnic food may have started a long time ago, however, only in recent decades the concept of ethnic restaurants has grown in popularity and turned into a speciality in the restaurant industry (Tey et al., 2018).

In recent years, Middle Eastern cuisine and ingredients have started to receive more attention and admiration from the Western palate, and big names such as Bidfood (2020) have announced 'Middle East' as either their trend of the year or the market trend. Despite the growing popularity, the literature regarding the 'Middle Eastern food market' is relatively limited, with the few previous studies written from a nutrition (e.g. Hoteit et al., 2020) or history (e.g. Naguib, 2009) perspective.

There are no official statistics about the number of Middle Eastern restaurants within the UK, however, a simple web search of ethnic restaurants would reveal the rapid increase in their number. The growing supply and demand of Middle Eastern food requires thorough and in-depth research to develop a better insight towards the market, to provide guidelines for the business owners to run their

establishments more efficiently, and to provide memorable experiences for the customer.

While Iranian cuisine, as one of the culinary cultures in the Middle East, shares a number of similarities with the other countries in the region, it also has many special techniques, recipes, and ingredients that are unique to Iran. Based on one of the latest reports by Statistica, approximately 37,000 Iranian nationals lived in the UK in 2021 (individuals with dual nationalities were not included, so the real number can be even higher), which was 2,000 more people compared to 2020 (Clark, 2021). It is believed that more than 4,000 of them live in London. A simple online search on Google or websites such as TripAdvisor shows that there are over one hundred Iranian restaurants in London alone (TripAdvisor, 2024), serving a variety of meals from different regions of Iran. As the number of Iranian nationals and restaurants continues to increase, it is important for researchers to investigate and identify the primary factors that contribute to business development and provide guidelines and suggestions for business owners to support their growth and success.

The importance of authenticity has been highlighted in the literature as a significant element of ethnic restaurants (Bell et al., 1994; Ebster and Guist, 2005; Lego et al., 2002; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007; Roseman, 2006; Wood and Muñoz, 2007). One of the main reasons that individuals visit an ethnic restaurant is known to be their willingness to explore the ethnic culture and expand their knowledge (Ebster and Guist, 2005; Lego et al., 2002; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007), and this can only be achieved by having an authentic experience (Okumus, Okumus, and McKercher, 2007). An authentic experience is believed to positively influence

the consumers' perceptions, satisfaction and repurchase intention (Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007).

The literature suggests that, in addition to food, other elements like geographical distance from the host country (Wood and Muñoz, 2007), prior experience (Ebster and Guist, 2005), ethnic music and dining companions (Wen et al., 2020) are also associated with perceived authenticity in a restaurant. Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) claim that while multiple factors influence the perceived authenticity, it is communicated more through the food attributes than the atmospheric elements. Consequently, while it is clear that a combination of both food and non-food elements shapes the customers' experience in a restaurant, there is no agreement on the elements with the most dominant impact on the perception of authenticity.

Having the customer like the taste of the food served is a winning point, but it is not the only element that influences the perception during the dining experience. Humans are sensory beings, and a dining experience is multi-layered, and which engages multiple senses simultaneously, eventually shaping a multi-sensory experience (Youssef and Spence, 2023). Sensory experience is defined as "an individual's perception of goods or services or other elements in a service process as an image that challenges the human mind and senses" (Hultén, 2011, p.258). A multi-sensory experience occurs when more than one of the five human senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, smell) is involved in the process. Service providers could enhance customer engagement by using sensory strategies that are tangible or intangible cues (e.g. ethnic music, specific decoration, a unique colour palette, etc), which are *purposefully* designed and applied to trigger the senses to achieve the desired outcome (Hultén, 2011).

1.2 Rationale for the study

Human beings live in an 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), which is developing rapidly, leading to new and heightened needs, demands and expectations. The impact of human senses on diners' perceptions of restaurants is a topic of growing interest, with significant implications for the hospitality industry. Despite the expanding body of research in this field, there remains further room for exploration and development. Although the existing literature addresses the human five senses, they are primarily one-dimensional and do not incorporate a comprehensive multi-sensory perspective. Some examples of the literature regarding the sensory elements within dining settings are Milliman (1986), Feinstein, Hinskton, and Erdem (2002), Sullivan (2002) and Areni (2003a&b), looking at the sense of sound through the examination of various effects of music. Others have studied various elements about the physical environment and 'servicescape' of the restaurants (King et al., 2007; Namasivayam, and Mattila, 2007; Han and Ryu, 2009; Horng and Hsu, 2020; Chao, Fu, and Liang, 2021; Asghar Ali et al., 2021).

Another field of sensory studies in the current literature focuses on the concept of synaesthesia, which is the effects of one sensory element on triggering the perception of another sense, for example, the effects of the shape of a food (vision) or the word associated with a particular food (vision and sound) on the perception of taste (Spence and Youssef, 2019; Gallace, Boschini and Spence, 2011; Koch and Koch, 2003). However, these studies are specifically focused on the attributes

related to psychology, neurology, product development and culinary arts and do not cover the whole dining experience.

The outcomes of a systematic literature review on authenticity within dining settings, conducted by Le et al. (2019), indicated that among the 85 records considered, none examined authenticity considering all five human senses. Among the 85 identified studies, Wong, and Baldwin (2018) researched authenticity within ethnic restaurants, and although the study attempted to look at the subject matter from a multi-sensory perspective, only the senses of taste, vision and smell are referred to, and the other two senses of sound and touch were not included. Therefore, the current study critically evaluates the role of sensory elements in the creation of authenticity in ethnic restaurants and discusses the most common and impactful sensory strategies when dining in Iranian ethnic restaurants.

Authenticity, one of the core foundations of the current research, is a multidimensional concept that is 'co-created' by both consumers and suppliers (Le et al., 2019). To emphasise the importance of considering this cocreation, the objective of the current study is to investigate the link between authenticity and sensory strategies from the perspectives of both the service providers (restaurateurs) and the customers (restaurant diners) to develop a deeper understanding of how authenticity is formed and perceived. The adaptation of a multi-dimensional approach has also provided the opportunity to establish a well-grounded platform to investigate and examine the proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 1.4) which will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

1.3 Research Aim

This research aims to critically evaluate the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of restaurateurs and diners towards sensory strategies and their link with authenticity in Iranian restaurants in London. It intends to address the existing gap concerning these three concepts (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Research knowledge gap, identified from the systematic literature review (Chapter 3)

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are set out as follows:

1. To review and critically discuss the existing literature on the application of sensory elements in the restaurant industry. (RQ1)
2. To explore and appraise the understanding of authenticity among restaurateurs in Iranian restaurants in London. (RQ2 and 3)

3. To critically analyse the approach that Iranian restaurateurs¹ adopt to improve the sensory authentic experience of their customers. (RQ2 and 3)
4. To analyse the impact of sensory elements on the perception of authenticity among diners at Iranian restaurants in London. (RQ4)
5. To develop a framework to better understand the impact of sensory tools on perceived authenticity in ethnic restaurants. (RQ 2, 3, and 4)

1.5 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the current state of research on the role of sensory strategies on the perceptions of authenticity in dining settings?

RQ2. To what extent are the Iranian restaurateurs concerned with authenticity in their restaurants?

RQ3. To what extent are the Iranian restaurateurs aware of using sensory strategies in their restaurants?

RQ4. How do sensory strategies affect customers' perception of authenticity in Iranian restaurants?

1.6 Contribution to knowledge

Bertil Hultén, one of the leading scholars in sensory studies, has highlighted the importance of investigating the relationship between the five human senses and has suggested that designing a “sensory manual” relating to all senses could help identify and manage the sensory strategies within businesses (Hultén, 2011 p269).

¹ Iranian restaurateurs refer to the restaurateurs who work in Iranian restaurants. and does not address their ethnicity.

The main element of originality in this study is the development of a framework (see the conceptual framework Figure 1.4 and the final framework Figure 8.1) that demonstrates the relationship between the human five senses and sensory strategies and the perception of authenticity. The final framework (Figure 8.1) encompasses all five sensory elements and the potential strategies that are associated with them. The proposed framework is based on the recent evidence collected by the researcher through the analysis of the interviews with restaurateurs and diners.

The study also develops and tests a 'sensory profiling' method that facilitates the identification, analysis, and evaluation of the various sensory strategies within restaurants via observation (Section 4.5.2). While the current study is focused on Iranian restaurants, the application of the tool will be suitable for other types of ethnic restaurants as well.

1.7 Potential impacts of the research

The developed framework (Figure 8.1) provides a road map for ethnic restaurants and would enable the managers to use the proposed sensory profiling method and the framework to record and identify their strengths and weaknesses related to the sensory strategies, improve the service they provide and develop new strategies to enhance their customers' experience. The proposed framework would also assist new food businesses in evaluating their business plans and sensory strategies prior to the opening of their establishments to enhance their efficiency and avoid additional costs.

According to a recent market report from Mintel (2021), the cost of the restaurant operation, including business rates and wages, is continuously rising, as a

reflection of the new economic situation and COVID-19 (Gursoy and Chi, 2020). There is a need for tested and verified guidelines and frameworks to eliminate the need for ‘trial and error’ and, consequently, to minimise the risks of financial loss and unemployment.

1.8 Theoretical framework

This study is based on the Sensory Marketing model (SM model), introduced by Hultén et al. (2009), an extended version of the Stimuli-Organism-Response model (S-O-R model), also known as the M-R mode (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), and the concept of constructive authenticity.

1.8.1 Extended S-O-R paradigm (M-R model)

The Mehrabian and Russell (M-R) model, also known as the S-O-R paradigm (Figure 1.2), is one of the most significant models in environmental psychology and is commonly utilised in retail, hospitality, and tourism contexts (e.g. Chang, Eckman and Yan, 2011; Hameed, Hussain and Khan, 2022; Kim, Lee and Jung, 2020). The model explains the effect of the physical environment on the individuals’ behaviours and demonstrates that stimuli can affect the individual’s emotions (organisms) and, in turn, influence the individual’s response towards the environment (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

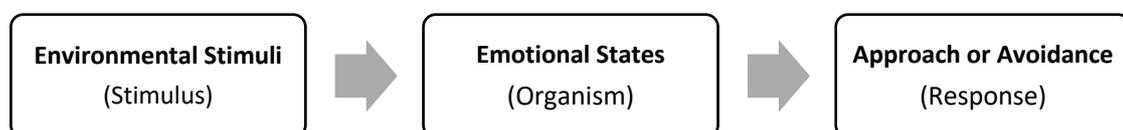


Figure 1.2 The original S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974)

The original model has considered only the environment as a stimulus (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), but in the extended version, additional factors like food and

service are included to extend its practicality and applicability within restaurants. The extended version of the M-R model has been widely used and tested within ethnic dining literature (Liu and Jang, 2009 (a & b); Jang, Ha and Park, 2012; Peng, Chen and Hung, 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Tan, Goh and Lim, 2022; Kim and Lee, 2022; Levitt et al., 2021).

1.8.2 Hultén S-M model

Hultén S-M model (Figure 1.3) is originally linked with the notion of sensory marketing. The model highlights the importance of a multi-sensory experience in differentiating the business and positioning it in the consumers' minds. The model

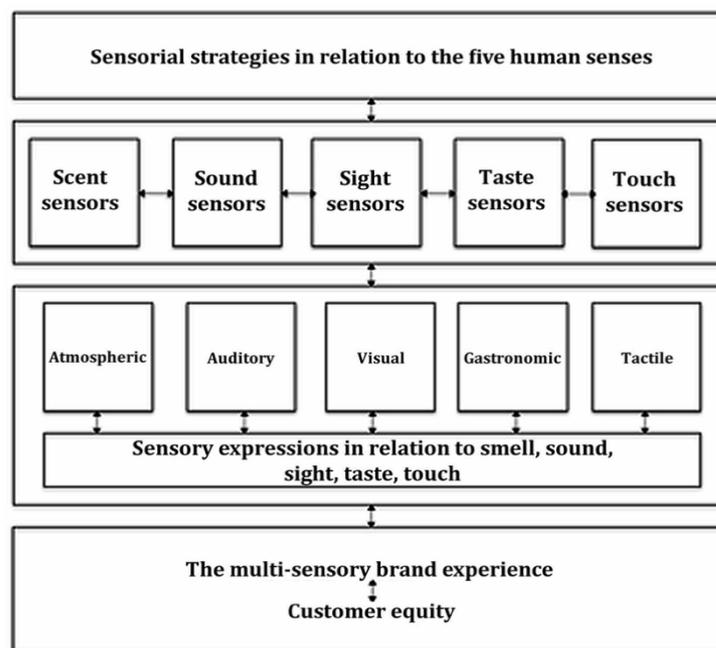


Figure 1.3 The -Explanatory- Sensory Marketing Model (Hultén, 2015)

has been mainly employed to investigate the relationships between the sensory elements and customer behaviours like loyalty, purchase, and revisit intentions within various types of dining settings (Bothma and Kühn, 2018; Chen and Lee, 2018; Jani and Han, 2011). In the current study, the sensory elements and

strategies are identified, their interlocking relationships with each other are explored, and their impact on the perceived authenticity is analysed.

1.8.3 Constructive authenticity

The current research is based on the constructivist approach towards authenticity since it assesses the perceptions, experiences, and understandings of individuals towards authenticity. Constructivists believe that authenticity is based on the perceptions, interpretations and understanding of the individuals regarding the proposed situation or object (Mkono, 2012) and define it as a product of social constructions. A detailed discussion of the existing theoretical approaches towards authenticity, with a focus on constructivism, is presented in section 2.3.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1.4) has been designed considering the study's aims and objectives, the findings of the literature review, and the theoretical frameworks of the research. The framework summarises the essence of the study and serves as a visual representation of the conceptual relationships between the variables and aids the reader in understanding the research's underlying theoretical foundations.

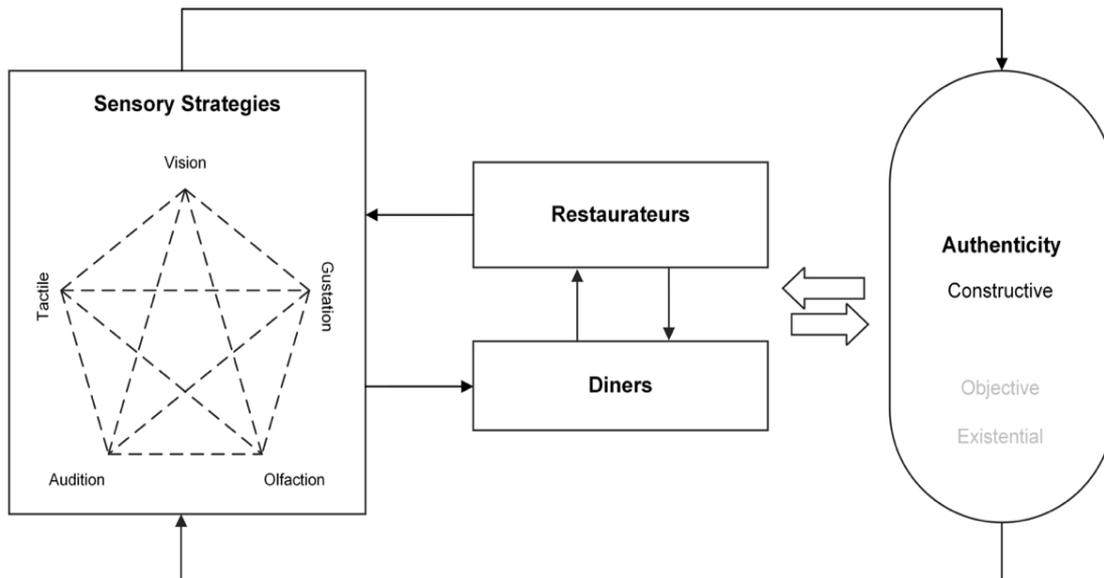


Figure 1.4 The proposed conceptual framework depicting the relationship between the sensory strategies and authenticity

The foundation for the proposed framework is the extended M-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), which studies the effects of the physical environment on individuals' behaviours (perceptions in this case) and then it is combined with the Hultén's S-M model (Hultén et al., 2009) to emphasize the multi-sensory aspect of the study. The final part of the model is inspired by the constructivist approach towards authenticity which in this study is developed from the perceptions of the restaurateurs and diners (Iranian and non-Iranian).

1.10 An insight into researcher's positionally and data collection challenges

The process of research is shaped by various factors, including the researcher and the participants involved. Thus, it is essential to reflect on the influence of these stakeholders on both the progress and outcomes of research projects (Bourke, 2014). A reflexive researcher engages in a critical evaluation of their actions and

role during the preparation, conduct, analysis, and reporting of findings in a research project (Mason-Bish, 2019). This self-reflection allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of their contribution to the research and the impact it may have on the results.

This section is focused on the positionality of the researcher and its influence on the research as a whole. Positionality can be described as an individual's viewpoint and position towards a research task and its context (Savin-Baden and Major, 2023; Rowe, 2014).

One's viewpoint is rooted in their beliefs about several factors. First the nature of reality and what is known about the world (ontological assumptions), second their beliefs about the nature of knowledge (epistemological assumptions) and finally, their assumptions about the way individuals interact with their surrounding environment (Sikes, 2004; Bahari, 2010; Scotland, 2012; Ormston, et al., 2014).

An individual's worldview is also shaped by other factors including but not limited to their political views, religion, gender, geographical location, ethnicity, race, social class and (dis)abilities (Sikes, 2004; Wellington, Hunt and Bathmaker, 2005). Positionality influences the research's conduct and results (Rowe, 2014). While fixed aspects such as gender, race, and nationality may predispose someone towards a particular point or point of view, that does not mean these automatically lead to particular views or perspectives (Holmes, 2020).

The following section is written in first person narrative to allow the researcher to reflect on her stance in relation to the context of this thesis.

My name is Neda. I was born and raised in Iran. My first language is Farsi. I am married and currently in my thirties. This is a simple description of my identity, however, like any other researcher, my position towards my research cannot be described this simply.

My professional background consists of various positions related to the food industry, such as food photographer, chef instructor, pastry chef, chocolatier and currently university lecturer.

My academic background includes two very distinct fields, and while not directly related at first glance, they both contributed to this thesis significantly. I obtained my Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature, and then switched fields to pursue my postgraduate studies in Food Business Management. Being introduced to the academic world through the subjectivity and fluidity of literature and always being encouraged to look beyond the words on paper, my viewpoint towards the world is filtered through an interpretivism lens. And I believe that there is an unseen, beyond the scene.

My stance towards the authenticity of Iranian food as an ethnic food in the UK is relatively complex. With no particular order, I am an Iranian immigrant, with extensive first-hand experience of Iranian cuisine and culinary culture, who also will be frustrated to see pepper in her Gheymeh², a food enthusiast with the desire to experience beyond what she had always experienced and finally a qualitative researcher who is aiming to ensure that her findings represent the realities of all involved stakeholders in a dining experience. This complexity was indeed an

² Gheymeh - قیمه is a popular Iranian stew, and while common in the UK, the original recipe does not include peppers.

initiation to practice ongoing reflexivity (see section 4.6.2) and an opportunity to be open-minded towards the different -and sometimes contrasting- viewpoints of the participants.

While my ethnicity and first language could be argued as potential sources of bias in this research, I firmly believe that if I was a non-Iranian and/or non-Farsi speaker researcher and did not have the lived experience of the culture, I would not be able to successfully identify the findings beyond those already presented in the existing literature. To address the potential risk of bias and mitigate the risk of selective interpretation, I frequently audio-recorded my thoughts after data collection sessions and shared my observations with my supervisors. Through these practices, I believe my findings are a true reflection of the observations and insights gathered throughout the project.

Another aspect of my identity, gender, was in fact an element which turned out to be a challenge throughout the data collection and participant recruitment of the research. After encountering several unfavourable reactions when trying to contact and visit restaurants, I altered the recruitment strategy and decided to have a male companion when visiting the restaurants. This change resulted in a more positive response from most restaurateurs, who agreed to participate in interviews. While investigating the reasons behind such encounters is outside the scope of the current research, my lived experiences hint at the potential influence of the patriarchal culture of Iran being combined with the data collection setting being the male-dominated hospitality industry.

Additionally, Iran's socio-cultural climate and the wariness of some Iranians towards strangers and sharing information with them could be another inevitable factor that impacted the outcomes of this research. Despite the utmost hospitality of the Iranians and their amicable demeanour towards guests (see section 2.5), many restaurateurs declined to participate in interviews without any explanation or opportunity for further discussion.

Considering all the above, I acknowledge that my identity, personal stance, and perspective played a significant role in what I chose to investigate, the direction of the research process, and which findings I deemed the most significant, and how the conclusions are reported and discussed.

1.11 Thesis outline

The research presented in this thesis is arranged in the following order:

Chapter 2 presents a critical review and discussion of the existing literature on ethnic food and restaurants. It also explores the theoretical perspectives towards authenticity and the connections between authenticity and dining experiences and offers a brief overview of the Iranian hospitality culture.

Chapter 3 covers the details of a systematic review of sensory elements within dining settings. It presents and discusses the process and findings of the systematic review.

Chapter 4 introduces and discusses the data collection procedure, looking at the theory of research, the research design, the data analysis methods, and an evaluation of the methodology.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the interviews with restaurateurs and diners (in order) and thematically analyse and discuss them.

Chapter 7 discusses the overall findings and views of the restaurateurs and diners considering the existing literature.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis and presents the theoretical and managerial implications of the current research, as well as the research limitations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the extant literature concerning various aspects relevant to this research. Initially, the discussion will address ethnic cuisine and dining establishments, including the definition of ethnic food, its significance in dining out, and the popularity and market share of ethnic food in the UK. The chapter will be continued by presenting an examination of various theoretical viewpoints on authenticity. Subsequently, the connection between food, dining experiences, and authenticity will be investigated. Concluding this section, a concise overview of Iranian hospitality culture will be provided, offering readers a foundational understanding of key aspects of Iranian hospitality in preparation for the subsequent analysis of relevant findings.

2.2 Ethnic Food and Restaurants

Food is one of the basic physiological needs of humans (Lowenberg et al., 1979), and as time has passed, it has become the foundation for the civilisation and growth of nations (Chatzopoulou, 2018). Food is directly linked with a nation's history and cultural practices and is one of the most important communication tools among people of different nationalities and is the representative of their identity, heritage, and religious beliefs (Assiouras et al., 2015; Beverland, 2005; Cusack, 2000; Okumus, Okumus, and McKercher, 2007).

Ethnic food can be referred to the traditional food that represents the culture of a specific group who are not from the home market (Leung, 2010, Kim and Jang, 2016), and is a combination of the referent group's culture, religion, and tradition

(Li et al., 2023). Therefore, what is considered the national food of a region, can be recognised as ethnic food in foreign countries (Inglis and Gimlin, 2009).

People tend to consume ethnic food as a way of exploring or appreciating the culture of the destination and to bring variety and a sense of gastronomic adventure to their eating habits (Hashemi et al., 2023; Mitchell and Hall, 2004; Tey et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2019; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007). For the past couple of decades as a result of globalisation, the surge in immigration (Ayyub, 2015), the increased popularity of international tourism (Verbeke and Poquiviqui, 2005) and the promotion of cultural diversity (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Okumus, Okumus, and McKercher, 2007), ethnic cuisine has become a competitive and important segment in the food industry (Tey et al., 2018; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007) and novel business opportunities have emerged (Kim and Jang, 2016). Therefore, ethnic food business owners are required to put extra effort towards formulating effective strategies to remain competitive and attract customers (Jang, Ha and Park, 2012).

While a number of studies have looked at different aspects of ethnic restaurants such as service quality (Ha and Jang, 2012), perceived risks and acceptance (Jang and Kim, 2015), origin of food (Youn and Kim, 2017), visual presentation of the food (Youn, 2024), different dimension of authenticity (Kim and Song, 2022) and menu analysis (Sormaz et al., 2023), the literature has yet to address other factors such as the application of sensory tools and the strategies concerning them, which could impact both the dining experience of the costumers and the performance and success of ethic restaurants.

2.2.1 Ethnic Restaurants in the UK

When it comes to the UK, the multi-cultural composition of major cities such as London acts as a catalyst for the popularity and expansion of ethnic restaurants. Based on a recent report by Mintel (2023), the diverse ethnic food service in the UK has fuelled the market to grow by 17% from £11 billion in 2021 to £12.9 billion in 2022. According to the same report, the market value of the ethnic foodservice sector is projected to increase annually between 2023 and 2027, driven by sustained demand for eating-out experiences. As depicted in Figure 2.1 the value of the UK ethnic foodservice market is expected to grow by 20%, reaching nearly £17 billion by 2027.

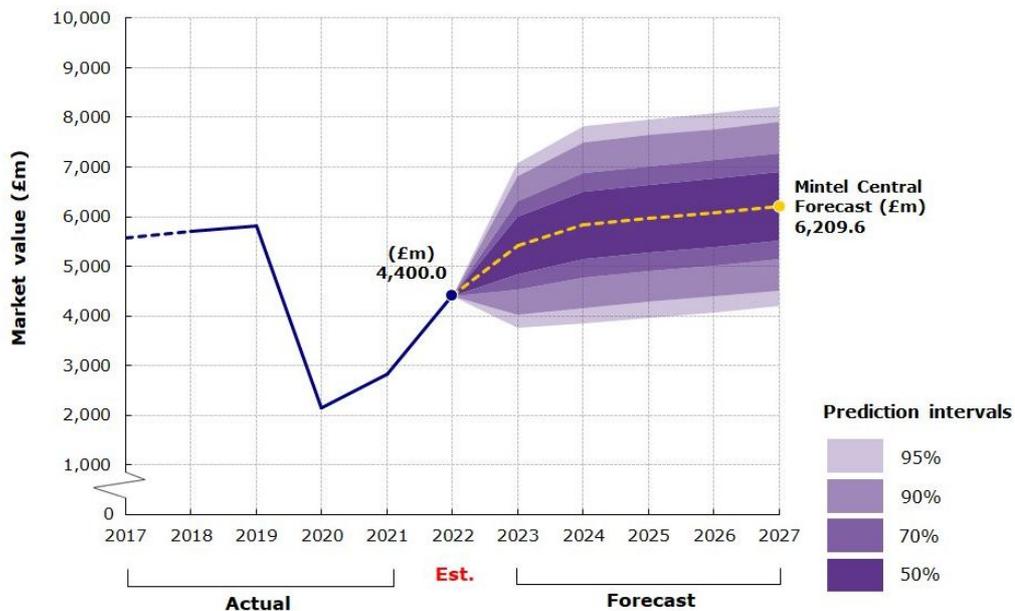


Figure 2.1 UK ethnic foodservice (eat-in) market total value, 2017-27 (Source: Mintel, 2023)

Mintel (2023) states that in the three months leading to February 2023, 44% of Britons have dined at an ethnic restaurant, up from 42% in December 2021. Among

ethnic cuisines, Chinese/Taiwanese (57%) and Indian/South Asian (42%) restaurants and takeaways are the most popular among UK consumers.

Nonetheless, there has been a shift in their popularity, with the demand for them decreasing by 4% and 1%, respectively. Conversely, there has been a notable rise in the popularity of Middle Eastern/Greek food by 3%, underscoring the importance of studying these emerging ethnic restaurant trends. Therefore, the focus of the current research is on Iranian restaurants in London as a subcategory of Middle Eastern restaurants within one of the major cities of the UK.

Table 2.1 Annual changes in types of ethnic restaurant/takeaway used, 2018-23 (Base: 2,000 internet users aged 16+)

Types of cuisine	Nov-18	Nov-19	Dec-20	Dec-21	Feb-23	% change
	%	%	%	%	%	Nov 2018 -Feb 2023
Chinese/Taiwanese	61	55	45	56	57	-4
Indian/South Asian (e.g. Bangladesh)	43	41	32	42	42	-1
Southeast Asian (e.g. Thai, Vietnamese)	22	24	19	24	24	2
Middle Eastern/Greek	19	23	18	25	22	3
Mexican (incl. Tex-Mex)	22	24	18	23	21	-1
Japanese	15	19	16	21	18	3
Caribbean	12	15	15	19	16	4
South American	12	14	14	17	13	1
Moroccan/African	9	12	13	15	13	4
Korean	8	12	12	15	11	3

Source: Kantar Profiles/Mintel, November 2018-February 2023)

2.3 Theoretical perspectives towards Authenticity

Generally, what is believed to be genuine and true to the original, is accepted as 'authentic' (Abarca, 2004; Taylor, 1992). Despite using the same term, the existing research in different fields has investigated authenticity through different lenses, such as original and staged (MacCannell, 1973), hot and cool (Selwyn, 1996; Cohen and Cohen, 2012), emergent (Cohen, 1988) and objective, constructive and existential (Wang, 1999).

One of the widely applied approaches in the food and hospitality fields (e.g. Kim, Song and Youn, 2020; Youn and Kim, 2017; Sims, 2009) is Wang's (1999). Wang views authenticity from three main perspectives: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and post-modern or existential authenticity.

The objective perspective of authenticity considers it as a quantifiable and measurable concept that can be tested with a positivist approach to validate or reject claims of authenticity (Jones, 2009). This process of authentication usually relies on empirical evidence and scientific analysis and is independent of individuals' perception and judgement. For instance, the authentication of a museum piece or the investigation of food products to detect fraud and confirm the authenticity of items such as honey and olive oil (Stradling, Muhamadali and Goodacre, 2024), exemplify the objective viewpoint towards authenticity.

Wang's second approach toward authenticity is the existentialist or postmodern approach which sees authenticity as a self-centred concept and one can experience authenticity without the presence of an authentic "other" (Cohen, 2007).

The next perspective, which is also the lens that the current research studies authenticity through, is constructivism. The constructivist approach states that there is no absolute definition of authenticity, and it is dependent on the context rather than an object (Jang, Ha and Park, 2012). According to constructivists, authenticity is constructed socially or personally (Ebster and Guist, 2005; Kim and Jang, 2016), considering an individual's cultural knowledge, previous experience, social context, and interpretations (Wang, 1999). Constructivists also believe that the perception of authenticity can be influenced by exposure to mass media, stereotypical images, and word of mouth (Kosmály, 2012; Liang, Choi and Joppe, 2018). Therefore, the perception and interpretation of authenticity in the same setting may differ among individuals (Robinson and Clifford, 2012; Kim, Youn and Rao, 2017) and can be modified over time (Cohen, 1988).

Dining at ethnic restaurants is experiential and relatively subjective, influenced by various factors including but not limited to diners' previous experience, cultural background and unique sensory engagement. Therefore, employing a constructivist framework is particularly suitable to study the perception of authenticity in these contexts.

2.4 Food, Dining and Authenticity

Food from another country or culture is often received by foreign consumers as distinctive and unique, and this uniqueness or 'otherness' is usually perceived as 'authenticity' (Jang et al., 2012; Ha and Jang, 2010; Chhabra et al., 2013). In the contemporary era, the increased awareness towards cultural diversity has resulted in the request for the consumption of authentic products and services (Gilmore and

Pine, 2007). Authenticity is one of the prominent qualities of ethnic food which sets it apart from the local cuisine (Lego et al., 2002), and a restaurant could be called authentic when the food and the dining experience, project its “referent ethnicity” (Wang and Mattila, 2015). Food authenticity is judged by the ingredients, the recipes, the method of cooking the food and whether it has been prepared by natives or not (Sidali and Hemmerling, 2014). And environment authenticity is usually measured by assessing the interior and exterior design, the decoration, the music, and other tangible elements like employee uniforms (Jang, Liu and Namkung, 2011; Wang and Mattila, 2015). It has been discussed by several scholars that among all factors, food authenticity is the most important element for customers who dine at ethnic restaurants as they choose to eat in those restaurants to have a different experience than home (Tsai and Lu, 2012; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007; Kim and Jang, 2016).

Authenticity has been proven to be a ‘value-adding’ factor (Kim and Song, 2024; Kovács et al., 2014), a unique selling tool (Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2015), an element to increase the willingness to pay (Lin and Jiang, 2022), and an effective element in marketing and brand positioning (Sedmak and Mihalič, 2008; Robinson and Clifford, 2012) for food businesses. Nonetheless, the current literature is mainly diner-centric (e.g. Ebster and Guist, 2005; Wang and Mattila, 2015) and limited attention has been paid to service providers.

Among the limited studies involving service providers, Le et al. (2021) explore the relationship between service providers' and diners' interactions, focusing on how these interactions contribute to the construction of authenticity. Another example is Kraak and Holmqvist (2017), which also investigate the role of service providers,

specifically focusing on the language used in pubs and its effect on customers' perceptions of service authenticity and their overall experience.

Thus far, there remains a lack of academic attention towards the perceptions and awareness of authenticity among service providers in dining settings, as well as the strategies they may employ to shape customers' perceptions of authenticity. Existing research in this domain is sparse, with exceptions such as the investigation conducted by Chatzopoulou, Gorton, and Kuznesof (2019) in the context of Greek restaurants.

2.5 A brief overview of the Iranian hospitality culture

The following section discusses the different elements of Iranian hospitality culture with a focus on several cultural practices and beliefs which are common among Iranians.

Cultural values and practices are known to impact the beliefs and behaviours of individuals and consequently the provision of hospitality (Tsang, 2011). When Iranians are asked about their culture, one of the first characteristics that they proudly introduce themselves as is being hospitable (Edelstein, 2010). Guests have a very important place in Iranian households and are called 'Habib e Khoda'³ (حبيب خدا) which translates into the beloved of God. Iranian hospitality (Mehman Navazi⁴ – مهمان نوازی) is very distinct from what Western people are used to. It consists of endless Taarof⁵ (تعارف) – “the active, ritualized realization of differential perception of superiority and inferiority in interaction” (Beeman, 1986) – which

³ /hæbi:b e xodo:/

⁴ /mehmɑ:n nævɔ:z'i/

⁵ /tæʔɔ:rof/

should be performed with extreme Ehteram⁶ (احترام) – any verbal or non-verbal polite behaviour-.

Food is an inseparable part of Iranian hospitality. Food type, ingredients, portion, presentation, and every single detail are believed to be the determinants of hosts' respect and love for the guest, meaning the more laboursome the dish is, the more loved and respected one is as a guest (Tehrani and Duffy, 2015). The guest would be offered the food and regardless of the amount they eat, a repetitive insistence to have more food would persistently remain throughout the meal (Sahragard, no date).

The instances of such hospitality traditions are not only limited to households, and the longstanding significance of respecting guests in the Iranian culture has been always present in places of business (e.g. restaurants, hotels, guest houses, etc.). In the instance of restaurants, it is common to offer some food items for free to your guests and go above and beyond in offering a friendly and impeccable service.

Iranian hospitality, deeply influenced by cultural values such as Taarof and meticulous food preparation, significantly shapes the provision of hospitality services. These practices highlight the importance of respect and generosity in interactions with guests. Despite the richness of these practices, there is a notable gap in research on Iranian hospitality culture and examining how these cultural values are implemented in Iranian restaurants.

⁶ /ehterom/

2.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review offers a comprehensive overview of ethnic food and restaurants, identifying critical gaps in the existing research. It underscores the need to explore factors such as the application of sensory tools and strategic approaches that influence both customer dining experiences and the performance and success of ethnic restaurants. Furthermore, it highlights significant growth in the UK's ethnic restaurant sector, particularly in Middle Eastern cuisine.

The discussion on authenticity, particularly through Wang's (1999) approach, reveals that existing literature predominantly focuses on customers' opinions and perceptions, with insufficient attention given to the perspectives and awareness of service providers. This imbalance suggests a need for more research on the role of service providers in shaping authentic dining experiences.

Moreover, the review provides a brief overview of Iranian hospitality, offering foundational insights into the unique aspects of Iranian hospitality and the cultural significance placed on guests. Such information equips the reader to better understand the collected data and the analysis presented in chapters 5 and 6.

Given the importance of sensory elements and strategies, the subsequent chapter is dedicated to an extensive systematic literature review on sensory cues in dining settings, giving a better view of the known and unknown of the current literature.

CHAPTER 3 Systematic Literature Review of Sensory Cues in Dining Settings

3.1 Introduction

Conducting a systematic literature review allowed for the identification of the gaps in the existing literature of sensory cues in dining settings, helped to strengthen the research rationale and inspired the design and application of the data collection tools.

The systematic literature review (SLR) aims to critically investigate the current state of multisensory research within dining settings. More specifically, it identifies the different sensory elements that have been studied so far, addresses the geographical distribution of research on the topic critically discusses the source of data in the existing literature and highlights the gaps and limitations of the reviewed literature. The SLR strengthens the research rationale and informs the design and process of the primary data collection at different levels.

3.2 A systematic quantitative approach

A systematic quantitative approach can be used to review both quantitative and qualitative literature and is particularly useful when reviewing trans-disciplinary research (Pickering and Byrne, 2014). By using a transparent and reproducible system, the chance of partiality is minimised in the results (Pickering and Byrne, 2014); it also enables the researcher to avoid the bias which usually exists in traditional narrative reviews (Collins and Fauser, 2005), identifies the gaps in the literature (e.g. geographical, methodological, etc.) and highlights the areas that need further research.

3.3 Process of the systematic literature review

The systematic literature review carefully followed Yang, Khoo-Lattimore and Arcodia's (2017) 5-step process, adapted from the original 15-step process introduced by Pickering and Byrne (2014). Details of the review are presented in Figure 3.1.

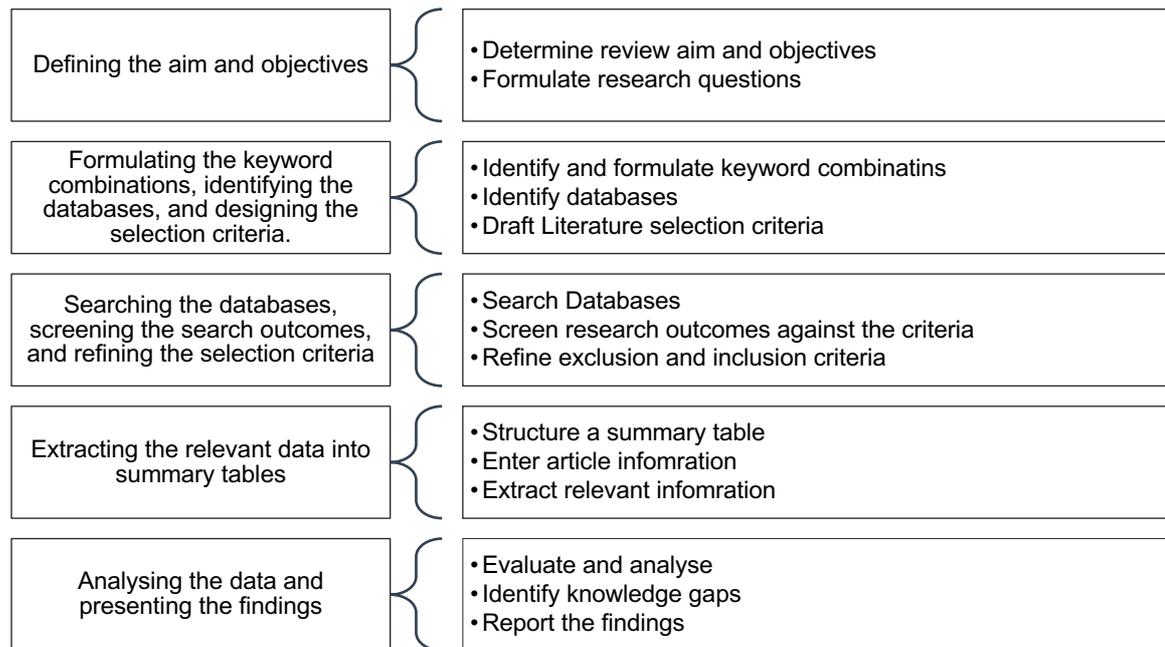


Figure 3.1 SLR Process. Adapted from Pickering and Byrne (2014) and Yang et al. (2017)

After defining the aim and objectives of the review (see section 3.1), the main and supporting terms were identified (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 The main and supporting terms for the SLR search

MAIN TERMS	SUPPORTING TERMS
SENSORY CUES	Sensory, Senses, Sensory cues, Sensory Strategy, Multi-sensory, Sensory Elements, Sensory Marketing
DINING SETTING	Restaurant, Food, Dining, Dining Experience, Food and Beverage, Environment, Servicescape, Foodservice, Atmosphere

Different keyword combinations were tested, and seven final keyword combinations were selected based on the relevance of the results. The final keyword combinations were sensory AND dining, sensory cues AND dining, multi-sensory AND dining, sensory marketing AND dining, dining AND servicescape, dining AND atmospherics, and dining AND environment AND servicescape. The selected keyword combinations were searched in three major academic databases: ScienceDirect, ProQuest and EBSCOhost (see Table 3.2 for the number of results and filters applied in each database).

Table 3.2 The number of results in each database and the search filters used

Database	No. of the results	Filter(s)
EBSCO host	438	1. Academic peer-reviewed journals 2. Language: English
ProQuest	4421	Language: English
ScienceDirect	3686	No filter

As of March 2024, the literature search against the databases resulted in 8,545 records. The results were exported to Endnote and Rayyan software for data management. After removing the duplicate references, the remaining 6691 results were screened in several rounds based on the selection criteria (Table 3.3), which was developed carefully considering the aim of the review.

Table 3.3 The inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the selection process

Inclusion Criteria	Full-text peer-reviewed academic journal articles
	English language
	Participants: food and beverage consumers
	Context: Commercial dining settings (staged or natural)
	Research focusing on one or more of the five human senses
	Research focusing on both senses and commercial dining settings
Exclusion Criteria	Studies in medical science or neuroscience.
	Studies that do not focus on dining experiences (e.g. food labelling, nutrition and health, dementia patients, new product development)
	Studies focusing on tourism studies
	Studies about locations where full-service interaction does not happen (e.g. University food halls, Takeaway restaurants, Hospital dining settings, Nursing homes)
	Studies focused on artificial intelligence and robots
	Studies focused on digital environments (e.g. website design, online menu, online reviews)
	Studies focused on Covid-19
	Studies with animals as the participants

During the initial step, 6274 records were excluded after screening the titles and abstracts. After the screening process, a further 297 articles were excluded. Some of the main reasons for the exclusion of articles were the absence of sensory elements (e.g. Kim, Magnini and Singal, 2011; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Horng et al., 2013; Liu and Mattila, 2016; Sengupta and Sreejesh, 2017; Espinosa et al., 2018; Jeong et al., 2018; Hu, Lai and King, 2020), the focus of the research being on the psychological role of sensory elements (e.g. colour of the plate) on the concepts like food choice, food preference and the amount of food consumed by individuals of different ages with no focus on dining settings (e.g. Rolls et al., 2007; Yip et al., 2013), and studies being done in places other than a dining setting (e.g. Berg and Sevón, 2014; De Nisco and Warnaby, 2014). Finally, 163 articles were considered eligible and were included in the review. The list of the selected articles is available in Appendix 1.

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart adapted from Moher et al. (2009), was used to present a detailed summary of the process of the literature search and the screening steps (see Figure 3.2).

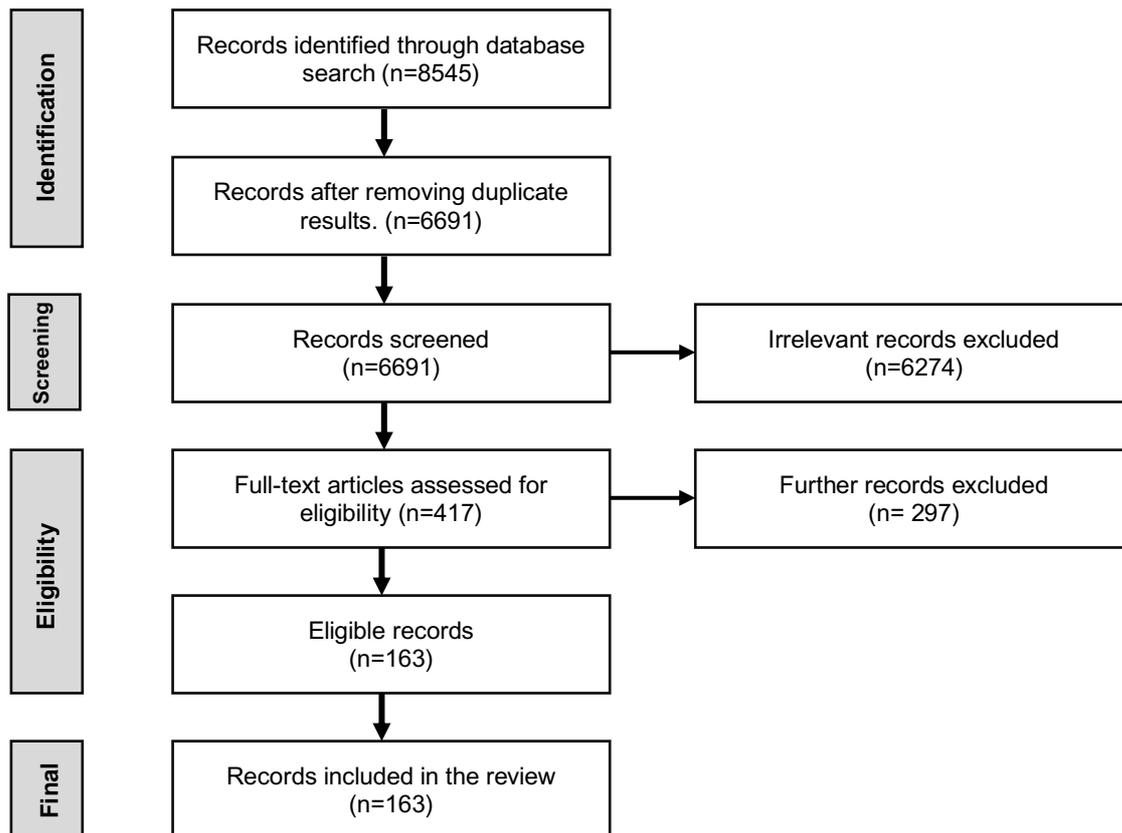


Figure 3.2 PRISMA diagram of the SLR selection process adapted from Moher et al. (2009)

A data extraction template was designed in Microsoft Excel software, and the information derived from the eligible papers was extracted into the template (Appendix 2). The final articles were quantitatively assessed, keeping the aim and objectives of the review in mind.

3.4 Findings

The following section demonstrates the findings of the systematic literature review from the final 163 selected articles (Appendix 1). The findings are categorised in terms of publication years, fields of the journals where the articles were published, methodical approaches used to conduct each study, sources of the collected data, and the geographical distribution of the studies. Details of data extracted under each category are available in Appendix 2.

3.4.1 Publication years

The publication years of the articles are shown in Figure 3.3. The first identified publication dates back to 1986, when Milliman investigated the impact of background music, particularly the music tempo as an atmospheric variable, on the behaviour of restaurant diners (Milliman, 1986).

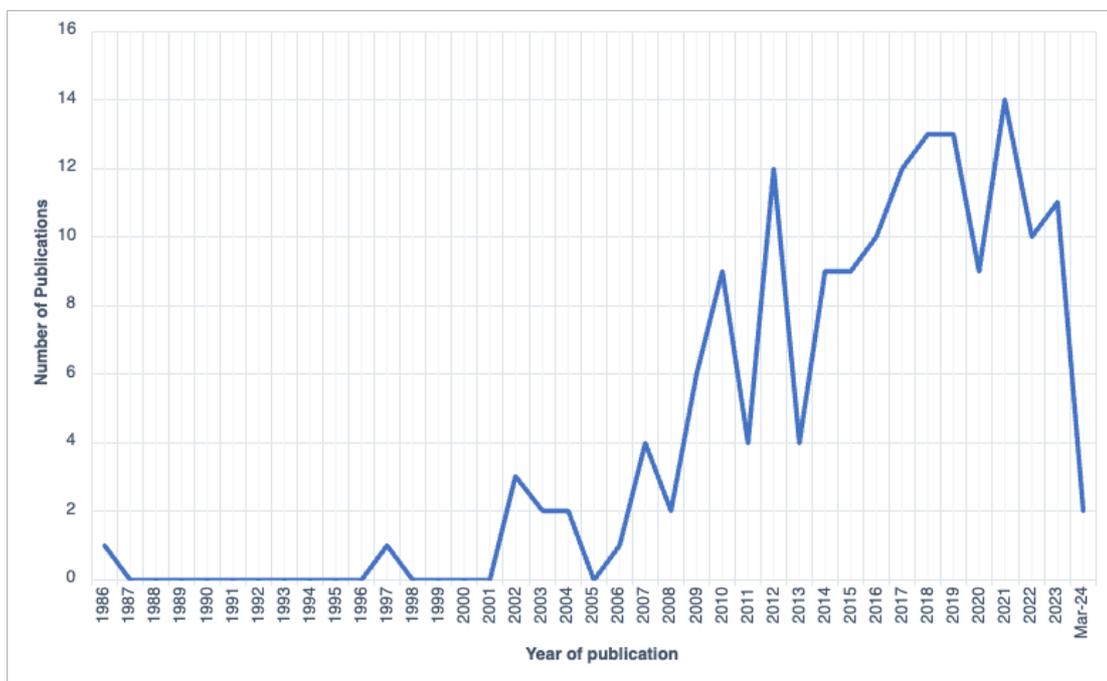


Figure 3.3 Number of publications by year (1996 – March 2024)

Until 2004, the majority of the conducted research focused on the impact of music on various aspects of the dining experience, such as the ethnic menu item selection (Feinstein, Hinskton, and Erdem, 2002), the diners' behaviour such as dining duration, expenditure, enjoyment and future purchase intentions (Sullivan, 2002; Stroebele and De Castro, 2004), and the restaurant managers beliefs and knowledge regarding the impact of music on different aspects of their business (Areni, 2003a; Areni, 2003b). In the following years, more aspects of a dining experience, including the physical environment, atmospheric tangible and intangible elements and the ambience, began to attract attention, and scholars started to apply models such as Bitner's Servicescape (Bitner, 1992) and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

The research on sensory elements within dining settings has attracted extended attention gradually, specifically since 2009. While this increase has not been consistent, a rising trend can be observed throughout the years, with the year 2021, having the highest number of publications (n=14).

3.4.2 Journal Fields

The major fields of the journals, the number of journals in each field and the number of articles published in each field are presented in Table 3.4. Even though the topic has attracted interest from various research fields, most of the identified articles are in the field of hospitality and tourism (40%), followed by food and culinary science (15%) and retail and services (12%). The remaining journals look at the topic from other perspectives such as marketing, finance, and behavioural science, while still focusing on the human five senses and dining settings.

Table 3.4 Major Journal Fields and number of articles in each field

Journal's Major Field	No. of Articles	%
Hospitality and Tourism	66	40%
<i>No 1: International Journal of Hospitality Management (25)</i> <i>No 2: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (10)</i> <i>No 3: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research (9)</i> <i>No 4: Other (22)</i>		
Food and Culinary Science	24	15%
Retail and Services	20	12%
Business	14	9%
Marketing	13	8%
Social and Behavioural Science	9	6%
Management -various	9	6%
Economics and Finance	6	4%
Consumer Research	2	1%
TOTAL	163	100%

3.4.3 Research Approaches and Source of Data

The details of research approaches utilised in the literature and the source of data (Diners, Industry professionals and Service providers, Both, Other) for each approach can be found in Table 3.5. Evidence from the literature review shows that the study of the sensory elements in dining settings is mainly done by collection and analysis of quantitative data (143 out of the 163 identified articles). The majority of the quantitative studies have looked at the sensory elements as drivers of diners' pre- or post-purchase behavioural intentions, satisfaction, quality perception (e.g. Milliman, 1986; Kim and Moon, 2009; Ha and Jang, 2012; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012; Yrjölä et al., 2019) and very few cases have considered the opinions, perceptions and awareness of restaurants' managers and owners regarding the sensory elements and their impact on revenue generation (Areni, 2003a&b; Shields, 2006).

From the 143 quantitative studies, only the following 4 studies reached both diners and service providers and/or industry professionals to collect the information regarding the elements (food quality and décor) which would determine the meal pricing in restaurants (Yim, Lee, and Kim, 2014); to compare the perceptions of quality between diners' and managers (Kukanja, 2017); to observe the servers' BMI and its relation with the amount of food ordered by the diners (Döring and Wansink, 2017) and to identify the differences in perceptions of diners and industry professionals (Chang, 2019).

Furthermore, notably few numbers of the studies have employed a qualitative (n=11) or mixed approach (n=9) approach to study the concept, and it can be seen that diners were still the main focus of mixed methods research (e.g. Arora, 2012; Ponnam and Balaji, 2014) while qualitative studies were investigating more the service providers (e.g. Areni, 2003(b); Alonso and Ogle, 2008; Puspita, 2015; Kraak and Holmqvist, 2017).

Table 3.5 Methods used and sources of data

Research Approach (Total=163)	Source of data (No. of Articles from the source)			
	Diners (145)	Restaurateurs (7)	Both (8)	Other sources (3)
Quantitative approach (143)	Diners (135)	Restaurateurs (2)	Diners & managers (2)	Restaurant observation (1)
			Diners & employees (1)	Restaurants' income data & Diners (1)
Qualitative approach (11)	Diners (4)	Restaurateurs (5)	Consumers and F&B experts (1)	Restaurant observation (1)
Mixed-methods approach (9)	Diners (6)	(0)	Diners & managers (2) Restaurateurs, F&B experts & scholars (1)	(0)

3.4.4 Key investigated senses

The frequency and percentage of the appearance of each sense in the literature are depicted in Table 3.6. As expected, vision, being the most studied sense of human beings (Krishna, 2012), is also at the top of the senses explored within dining settings, with 82% of the studies looking at the impact of various visual elements (e.g. colours, decoration, lighting, menu font and design, signage, staff physical appearance and food presentation, etc.) on different aspects of the dining experience.

The study of auditory cues is mainly focused on the impact of the music in dining settings and, in some cases, noise level (Shields, 2006; Raab et al., 2013; Lee, Lee and Dewald, 2016; Truong et al., 2017; Chang, 2019; Muskat et al., 2019), service providers tone of speech (Tsaur, Luoh and Syue, 2015) and the spoken language (Kraak and Holmqvist, 2017; Baker and Kim, 2018) are also studied.

Considering Krishna's (2012) definition of properties related to the human haptic system, this systematic review has identified temperature (environment and food), texture (food, walls, furniture, and utensil quality), and weight (menu) as factors associated with the sense of touch. Based on these properties, the sense of touch has been investigated in 23% of the studies.

Table 3.6 Frequency of each sense in the identified articles

Sense	Frequency	% (n=163)
Vision	134	82%
Audition	72	44%
Haptics	38	23%
Gustation	42	26%
Olfaction	37	23%
Other (e.g. ambience, environment without clarifying specific senses)	13	8%

As expected, the only element linked with the sense of taste in dining settings is the taste of the food and beverages served, and in most of the studies in this systematic review, the taste has been referred to as one of the attributes of the *Product (food) quality* introduced by Jang and Namkung (2009). Olfactory cues have been mentioned in 37 of the articles, among those some studies are focused on the smell/aroma of the food (e.g. Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012; Hyun and Kang, 2014; Ponnampalani and Balaji, 2014; Blešić et al., 2018; Yrjölä et al., 2019; Erkmen and Hancer, 2019; Cao et al., 2019), while some other mainly focus on the general smell or odour of the environment.

Others, here, refer to the articles which have not clearly specified all the senses that they are studying and have mentioned the more general terms such as atmospherics, physical environment, ambience, food quality, human five senses, and aesthetics (e.g. Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Ryu and Jang, 2007; Arora, 2012; Tripathi and Dave, 2016). These articles have been categorised separately to ensure consistency in the recorded data.

3.4.5 Geographical distribution of the studies

The systematic review revealed that around 36% of the studies had been conducted in the United States, followed by Taiwan, with 12 studies (7%), which is a significantly smaller number. The notable point is the considerably low contribution of the United Kingdom (7 studies) in the study of sensory elements within dining settings (see Figure 3.4). In 2019, the hospitality sector accounted for approximately 3% of the UK's total economic output, and in the three months to March 2020, 7.1% of UK employees were employed in the hospitality sector (Hutton, Irvine and Foley, 2022). It is important to note the term 'hospitality industry' in these statistics involves both food and accommodation businesses. Eleven articles did not specify the location of their studies, and one study (Döring and Wansink, 2017) has been done in three different countries (U.S., France and Spain).

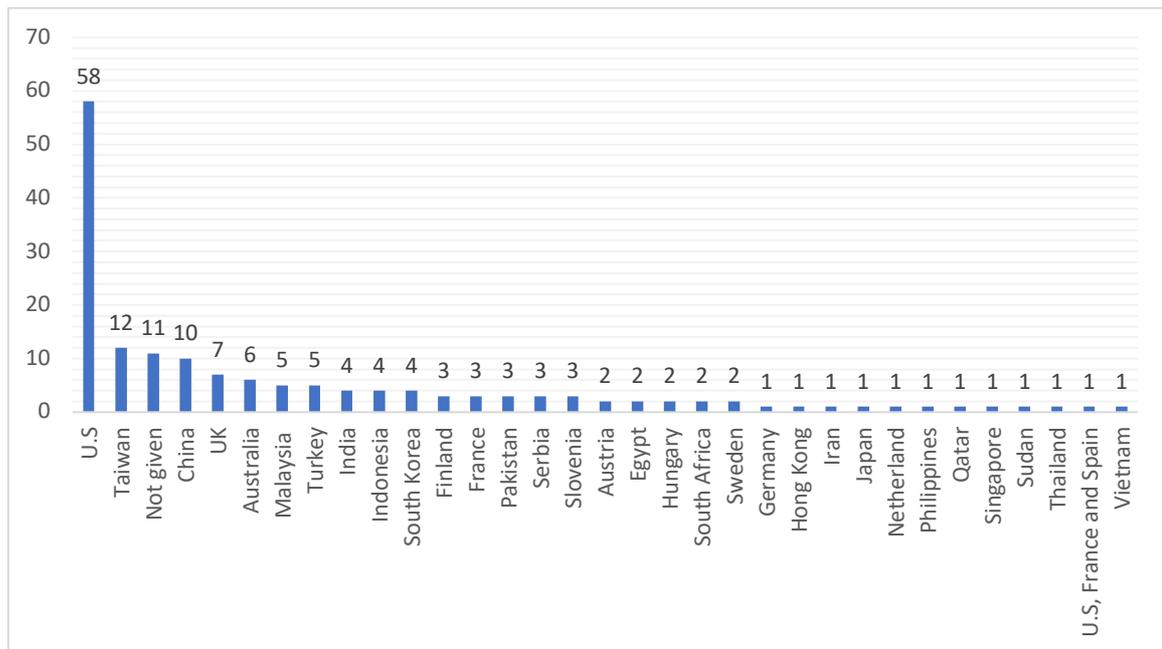


Figure 3.4 Number of studies conducted in each country

3.5 Discussion of Gaps and Conclusion

The systematic literature review identified and analysed the existing literature on various sensory elements and strategies within commercial dining settings. A summary of the SLR findings is presented in Figure 3.5. The major findings in terms of research gaps include the approach towards data collection, sources of the collected data, frequency of the investigated senses and the geographical distribution of the identified studies.

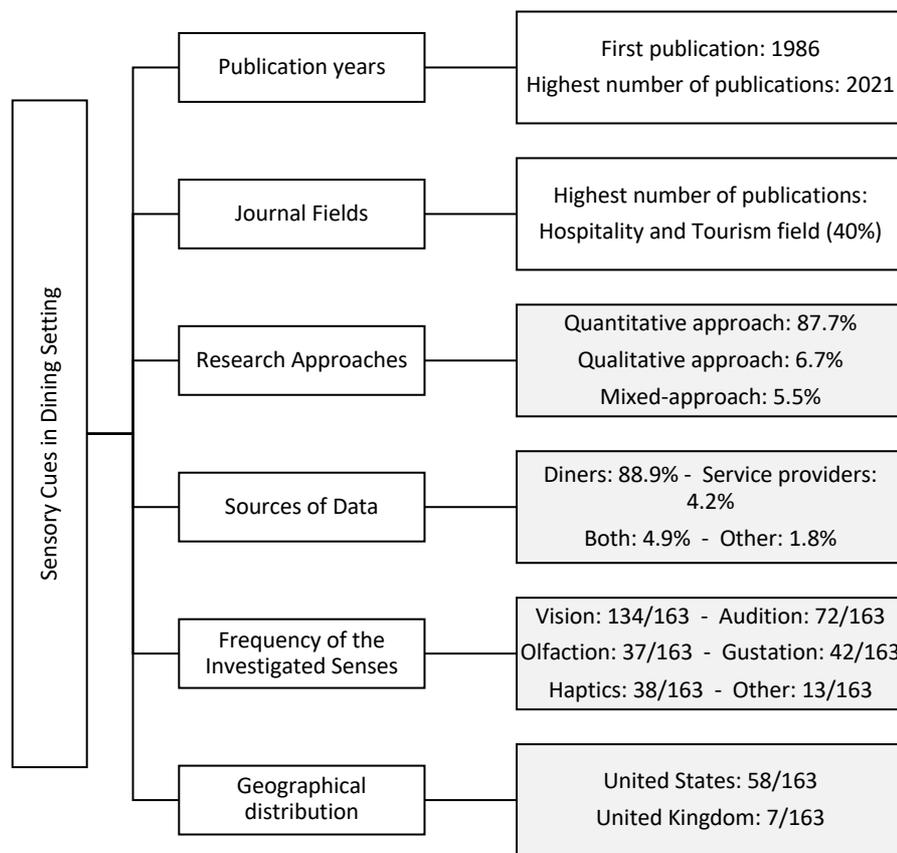


Figure 3.5 Summary of the SLR Findings (significant findings are highlighted in grey)

A noticeable observation from the analysis is the surge in scholarly publications relating to sensory cues in commercial dining settings in the 21st century. This increase highlights the growing recognition of sensory experiences within dining contexts. Moreover, the review highlights a tendency towards quantitative research methodologies over qualitative approaches, indicating an objective approach

towards the topic of the study. Therefore, the existing literature still requires further development to offer comprehensive and detailed insights into the role of the five human senses in dining settings.

Another important point uncovered by the review is regarding the source of data in the identified studies. Predominantly, the existing literature has relied on consumers' perceptions and preferences, revealing low scholarly attention to the service providers' perspective. Bridging this gap between the supply and demand sides is essential for mitigating misconceptions.

The review also reveals geographical disparities in the distribution of scholarly contributions on this subject matter. The United States emerges as the dominant location, with the highest volume of publications, while the United Kingdom trails with significantly fewer contributions (58 compared to 7).

Among the five senses, visual elements are primary focus of the existing literature, with 82% of identified studies concentrating on at least one visual element. While the prominence of vision in shaping dining experiences is undeniable, the review emphasise the importance of paying greater attention to other senses to form a comprehensive knowledge of multisensory dining environments. Therefore, the development of a multi-dimensional approach, ensuring the consideration of all the five senses is essential to form such knowledge. Nevertheless, while the insights gathered from the review are valuable, it is also essential to acknowledge its limitations. The exclusively quantitative nature of the analysis underscores the necessity for future research to embrace meta-synthesis methodologies, which facilitate the incorporation, analysis, and comparison of the findings.

CHAPTER 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and methodology adopted for the research project, followed by an explanation of the thematic analysis approach to data analysis. Additionally, the multi-step research design and the research methods used for data collection will be discussed, and information regarding the data validation and ethical considerations will be provided.

4.2 Case study research

A case can refer to an individual, an event, an institution, a society, a program, or a policy in its entirety (Sena, 2023). The case study method is an empirical research strategy designed to explore a contemporary phenomenon—the 'case'—in depth and within its actual context (Yin, 2018). One key strength of case study research is its reliance on diverse sources of evidence, which facilitates data triangulation (Yin, 2018). Despite criticisms regarding the scientific rigour and generalisability of case studies, they are valuable for providing a holistic view and in-depth understanding of social and behavioural phenomena (Noor, 2008).

The current research, a case study of Iranian restaurants in London, has implemented data triangulation to ensure rigour by collecting rich qualitative data from distinct populations (service providers and diners), and the data has been thoroughly analysed and synthesised in comparison with existing literature. To date, no other research has undertaken an in-depth investigation of this specific case, making this study a pioneering effort to explore Iranian ethnic restaurants in London.

4.3 Subjectivism and Constructivism

Subjectivism posits that social reality is moulded by the perceptions and actions of social actors, placing strong emphasis on individual subjectivity and the distinctive interpretations of reality. This perspective aligns with the constructivist view, underscoring the dynamic process of reality construction through social interactions and the establishment of shared meanings (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023). Within the constructivist framework, it is contended that reality undergoes continuous evolution and revision through social interactions, thus shaping the landscape of social phenomena. It is imperative to recognise that social actors, including research participants, are not solely engaged in environmental interactions but are also actively involved in the interpretation of events and the extraction of meaning from them, thereby actively contributing to the perpetual construction of social reality (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023). The current research is underpinned by the subjectivism and constructivist viewpoint. The research investigates the sensory strategies and authenticity from the individual perspectives of service providers and customers. The diverse interpretations of reality are recognised by referring to individual's opinions, experiences, and perceptions.

4.4 Interpretivism and qualitative research

Interpretivism, as a research paradigm, underscores the importance of recognising the cultural, contextual, and historical factors that contribute to the formation of unique social realities (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Interpretivism prioritises capturing the depth and diversity inherent in human experiences and insights by asserting that reality is inherently subjective and varies among individuals;

therefore, research participants could provide the research with distinct interpretations of a similar experience (Scotland, 2012; Collins, 2018). Furthermore, the adoption of the interpretivism paradigm holds the potential to yield data of heightened validity, as it relies on individuals' contributions while accounting for various influential variables, as emphasised (Myers, 2019). Consequently, interpretivism offers a nuanced and contextually rich framework through which researchers can engage in the exploration and comprehension of intricate social phenomena. Since this research aims to investigate the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the participants, it follows an interpretive paradigm and demonstrates an in-depth and detailed analysis of the collected data by investigating individual and social behaviours (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2009). In accordance with the philosophical framework of interpretivism, researchers can interpret the actions of individuals in the context of their interactions, and these interpretations have the potential to influence changes in the researchers' understanding and conduct (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2009).

Interpretivists believe that the world is composed of numerous and ever-changing realities, and such a paradigm is particularly necessary when research is aimed at understating the differences between social actors. Accordingly, they assert that a comprehensive understanding of knowledge can only be achieved through participants' accounts of their contextual circumstances and their subjective interpretations of the reality they perceive (Patton, 2002); therefore, results stemming from the interpretive paradigm can be addressed as the “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2007, p.14).

Interpretive researchers employ qualitative research to explore the creation and interpretation of social experiences (Seale, 2017). Qualitative research is characterised by its flexibility and reduced structural constraints, which enables researchers to derive profound and comprehensive insights to unravel the complexities of the decision-making process. Moreover, qualitative research is particularly suitable for uncovering the values, attitudes and perceptions that underlie social phenomena, which would be difficult to capture using quantitative research methods (Morgan and Smircich, 1980)

Some of the most prominent methods used in qualitative research are in-depth interviews, ethnography, and grounded theory (Simons, 2014; Brunt, Semley and Horner, 2017). Interviews, being one of the popular instruments among interpretivists, enable researchers to collect the data in a naturalistic approach and develop insights into the topic through in-depth comprehension (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2018).

In the current research, the significance of using qualitative data lies in its capacity to explore the participants' personal and constructive interpretations of authenticity (Chatzopoulou, 2018; Brunt, Semley and Horner, 2017) as well as in providing a comprehensive insight into participants' perceptions and opinions of specific sensory approaches. The research approach adopted facilitates the collection of insightful information on **how** restaurateurs define authenticity in regard to what they do, **what** they know about the impact of sensory strategies on authenticity in their restaurants, **how** customers perceive authenticity in ethnic restaurants, and **what** the impact of the presence of sensory strategies on their perception is. Longhurst (2009) refers to the semi-structured interview as a "verbal interchange"

where the interviewer tries to obtain the necessary information from the interviewee by asking questions in a “conversational manner”. The reason for using semi-instructed interviews is to ensure that relevant and essential information concerning the research’s aims and objectives were collected and to give the interviewee the freedom to express their opinions.

4.5 Research Design

This research was carried out in three stages to meet the objectives and answer the study’s research questions (see sections 1.4 and 1.5). A summary of the research stages, their objectives, and the methodological approaches used to achieve them are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Overview of the research describing the stages, their objectives, and the methodological approaches

Stage	Objective	Method	Participants	Data Analysis
1	To review and critically evaluate the literature on the application of sensory strategies in the restaurant industry.	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	N/A	Quantitative SLR
2	To explore and appraise how authenticity is understood by restaurateurs in Iranian restaurants in London.	Step I Non-participant observation	London-based Iranian restaurants	Sensory profiling
	To evaluate how restaurateurs in Iranian restaurants apply sensory strategies to achieve their authenticity goal.	Step II Semi-structured interview	Restaurateurs	Thematic analysis
3	To analyse the impact of sensory tools on the perception of authenticity in the diners at Iranian restaurants in London.	Semi-structured interviews	Diners	Thematic analysis

The first stage of the research was a systematic literature review (SLR), included in Chapter 3, to aggregate, review and critically assess the existing literature on sensory elements within dining settings. Through the systematic literature review, the final version of the interview questions (Appendices 81 and 85) and the observation template for the sensory profiles (Appendix 3) were generated.

The second stage was divided into two steps. First, the ‘sensory profile’ of each restaurant was developed through non-participant observations. The second step included interviewing the restaurateurs about their awareness and opinions of sensory strategies and authenticity. In the third stage, previous and potential diners were asked to participate in a short interview concerning their perception and experiences of authenticity through sensory strategies in Iranian ethnic restaurants.

Figure 4.1 depicts the second and third stages of the methodology and covers the populations, sampling techniques, sample sizes and the data analysis methods of the conducted observations and interviews.

Paradigm	Interpretivism		
Methodology	Qualitative		
Method	Non-participant observation	Semi-Structured Interviews	
Population	Restaurants	Restaurateurs	Previous and potential diners
Sampling technique	Purposeful & Snowball Sampling (N=7)	Purposeful & snowball Sampling (N=9)	Quota Sampling (N=20)
Data Analysis Methods	Sensory profiling	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis

Figure 4.1 Research design for the second and third stages of the methodology

4.5.1 Stage 1 - Systematic Literature Review:

The initial stage of the research comprised a systematic literature review. This review had several key objectives, including identifying research gaps, reinforcing the research's rationale, and, most notably, determining relevant key themes for data collection. Accordingly, the subsequent phases of the research,

encompassing the formulation of the interviews' questions (Stage 2-Step I and Stage 3), along with the development of the observation template (Stage 2- Step II), were primarily informed by the measures identified during the systematic literature review.

The current research can be divided into two distinct areas regarding a systematic literature review. Firstly, a review that investigates the sensory cues within dining settings and, secondly, a review of the literature related to authenticity within dining settings. Given the comprehensive exploration of the latter subject by Le et al. (2019), the present study focused on conducting a systematic literature review on sensory cues within dining settings. The details of the review, including the rationale (section 3.1), process (section 3.3), and the findings and discussions (sections 3.4), are presented in CHAPTER 3.

4.5.2 Stage 2 – Sensory profiling (Restaurants) and Semi-structured interviews (Restaurateurs)

The following section presents the second stage of the data collection, including the process of developing the sensory profiles of the restaurants and the semi-structured interviews with the restaurateurs.

Step I – Sensory Profiling

Sensory profiling is originally used in sensory science and new product development (e.g. Delarue and Lawlor, 2022; Varela and Ares, 2012) to capture and measure the sensory characteristics of products, and is not very common for the study of physical locations. The researcher first considered the use of the term 'sensory blueprint,' inspired by the concept of a 'service blueprint' in the hospitality industry. However, since the observations did not include all five components of a

blueprint—customer actions, onstage actions, backstage actions, support processes, and physical evidence (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan, 2008)—and since the focus of the research was on the human five senses, sensory elements, and strategies, the researcher found a great opportunity in using sensory profiles. This approach allowed for converting the information collected via semi-structured, nonparticipant observation into sensory profiles for each restaurant. Photos and videos from different aspects (décor, music, food, tableware, etc.) of the participating restaurants were taken, and an observation template was completed for each restaurant. The use of an observation template assisted the researcher in ensuring consistency among all the observations. Piloting the template was another step to enhance the validity and credibility of the observation and mitigate the risk of bias. The template was improved by reflecting on the identified points which were missed in the initial design. The final version of the observation template can be found in Appendix 3. Besides recording all the aspects of the restaurants, the researcher also narrated her observations in the videos to make sure no detail was left out. The olfactory aspect (scent and smell) was identified through field research and recorded by the researcher, as there was no other way of recording this quality for future reference. Later, the collected data was used to form a sensory profile for each restaurant. A brief summary of the observations is presented in Table 4.2. and an example of the sensory profile is available in Appendix 4.

Table 4.2 A brief summary of the observations

Category	Sensory elements	Restaurant						
		RA	RB	RC	RD	RE	RF	RG
Restaurant Exterior	Signage: Iranian elements	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
	Signage Language	F&E	F&E	F&E	F	E	E	E
	Exterior design Iranian elements	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
	Exterior design: Colours:	Blue	Brown	Black Gold	Neutral Green	Grey Gold	White Metal	Brown Mustard Blue
	Food aroma	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
	Visibility of Iranian elements from outside	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Restaurant Interior	Iranian Wall décor (paintings, pictures, etc.)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Other Iranian decorations (statues, antiques, etc.)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	Floor: Iranian elements	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	Ceiling: Cultural elements	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
	Lighting: Iranian elements	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	Furniture: Iranian elements	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	Colour scheme	Neutral Wood	Brown Red Wood	Neutral Red Blue	Earthy Red	Copper Grey	Earthy Wood Red	Wood Neutral
	Tableware and cutlery: Iranian elements	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	Tablecloth: Iranian elements	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Food aroma	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
	Infused scent	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	Visible Iranian cooking style and tools	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
Music	Type	IM	CM IM	IM NIM	IM	IM	IM	IM
	Live music	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Staff	Uniforms: Iranian elements	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
	Spoken language with guests	F & E	F&E	F & E	F, E & Arabic	F & E	E	F & E
	Spoken language with each other	F	F	F	F&E	F&E	E	F
	Ethnicity (FOH)	I	I	I	I & NI	I	NI	I & NI
	Ethnicity (BOH)	?	I	?	?	I & NI	NI	I
Menu	Extra information (food, culture, history, etc.)	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Design: Iranian elements	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
	Colour scheme	White Brown	Neutral	Black Gold	Neutral	Neutral	White Red	Neutral
	Language	F & E	E	F & E	F&E	E	E	E
	Font: if Farsi menu available	R	N/A	C	R	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Food names	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
	Food Items: Iranian only	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Food	Presentation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Portion	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

Y:Yes, N:No, F:Farsi, E:English, N/A: Not Applicable, IM: Iranian Music, NIM: Non-Iranian music, CM: Classical music, I:Iranian, NI: Non-Iranian, R: Regular, C: Calligraphy

The data collected through observations provided the research with a more tangible series of information and was also used as a cross-reference when analysing the results. Sensory profiling was usually done right before the interviews with the restaurateurs (see Step II, below) and assisted with the identification of specific elements (e.g. a unique decoration, a particular food item, a different style of menu, etc.) exclusive to the restaurant which then were used as a supplement to the questions or examples during the interviews. The observations were also valuable in terms of unveiling the elements and strategies which existed in some of the restaurants but were not extensively discussed or evidenced in the existing literature (e.g. religious elements, as discussed in section 5.3.2.2).

Step II – Semi-structured interview (Restaurateurs)

Semi-structured interviews (see the restaurateurs' interview guide in Appendix 81) were carried out to obtain the restaurateurs' in-depth opinions, experiences, and level of awareness towards authenticity, sensory elements, and their application of sensorial strategies within their business.

Semi-structured interviews comprise a diverse range of interviews in which the interviewer begins with a predefined set of interview themes (in this case, identified through the systematic literature review and the general literature review). This type of interview, compared to a structured interview, allows for flexibility in the structure and the sequence in which questions are asked and the introduction of new questions in the research context (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009).

As of August 2021, 75 of the Iranian restaurants in London (see Appendix 82) were in line with the research's selection criteria (Figure 4.2). All of the restaurants were

contacted (by telephone, email or in person), and the restaurateurs who decided to proceed with the research (n=9) were provided with the research information sheet (Appendix 3), data management form (Appendix 84) and the research consent form (Appendix 85) to familiarise themselves with the details of the project and ask any questions that they may have. Finally, the researcher and the interviewees both signed copies of the consent form.

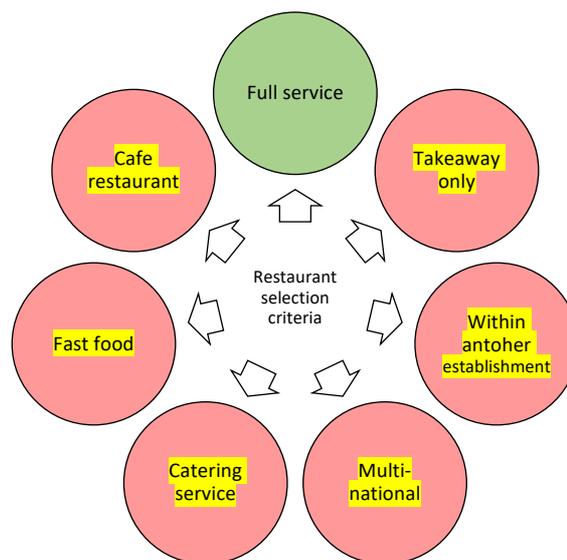


Figure 4.2 Exclusion (red) and Inclusion (green) criteria for the Iranian Restaurants in London to participate in the study

The restaurants were full-service; this excluded all the fast foods, takeaway services, café-restaurants, catering services, and restaurants within another establishment (e.g. hotel restaurants). The reason for excluding the non-full-service businesses was to ensure the consistency of the collected data and the reliability of the conclusions derived from them, as business goals, models, and the target market significantly differ between these two categories of food businesses. Multi-national restaurants where Iranian food was one of the options were also excluded as their inclusion could interfere with the aim and objectives of

the research. See Figure 4.2 for the summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for restaurants' participation in the study.

The purposeful sampling method was employed to target the restaurateurs, as it was assumed that they would provide the research with more detailed information. However, the restaurants were welcome to recommend other individuals (general manager, supervisor, head chef, etc.) better suited to answer questions about the restaurant's day-to-day operations. Where there was an opportunity for snowball sampling, participants kindly referred the researcher to other restaurateurs.

Nine of the London-based Iranian restaurateurs participated in the study. While the number of participants was slightly lower than expected, it was ensured that the interviewed individuals had the required expertise and experience to provide the research with insightful information.

In qualitative research, the quality of the collected data relies more on the analytical proficiency of the researcher than on the size of the interviewed sample (Patton, 2002; Pope, Ziebland and Mays, 2000). There are no rigid guidelines for determining an optimal sample size in qualitative studies, however, it is important to ascertain that participants are qualified to provide insights regarding the studied phenomenon. Another significant factor guiding the sample size in qualitative research is data saturation. The concept of saturation, or as broadly defined 'information redundancy' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), is a point in data analysis in which no new codes, themes or subthemes can be identified from data. While due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, reaching a definite point of saturation is unrealistic, a strategy used by the researcher, was to regularly reflect

on the codebook in regard to the identification and regularity of codes, themes, and subthemes.

The interview template included questions categorised into three main areas; background, perceptual and procedural questions (adapted from Chatzopoulou (2018)) to cover all the essential aspects of the research. First, *background questions* were asked to gain an in-depth understanding of the interviewees' experiences and the restaurants' background. The decision to initiate the interviews with a personal approach was to assure interviewees that their individual experiences, opinions and perceptions are valued (Rubin and Rubin, 2011).

Example:

To begin with, could you tell me more about yourself and how you came to manage [restaurant name]?

Second, *perceptual questions* were asked to investigate the interviewees' understanding of authenticity, how they would position their restaurant in regard to it and their strategies to reach their potential authenticity goals. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the restaurateurs' perception of authenticity in relation to their business was a valuable strategy to be informed of their mindset towards authenticity before hearing their opinions on the sensory elements and strategies, as well as making minor modifications to the structure of the questions to personalise the interview experience and get the best results possible.

Example:

- How would you define authenticity in relation to what you do?

Finally, *procedural questions* were asked to understand how sensory strategies were applied within different parts of the restaurant and what the perceptions and

experiences of the interviewees were toward them. Interview questions in this section were designed based on the measures linked to the human five senses found through the systematic literature review.

Example:

- What kind of music do you play in the restaurant?

- I can see that you do/do not have a menu in the Farsi language, why is the reason for that?

In cases of the interviewees providing off-topic information, the researcher would gently lead them back to the focus of the research. As the researcher is a native Farsi speaker, some of the interviews were conducted in the Farsi language for the convenience of the interviewees. For the interviews conducted in the Farsi language, the questions were carefully translated by the researcher, then reviewed by a bilingual (Farsi-English) individual, and then by a professional Farsi-speaking journalist to ensure that the questions were entirely understandable and had the perfect flow. No major modifications were made to the Farsi version after the reviews. The translation process made the researcher even more familiar with the collected data, as several rounds of careful reviewing were done before the start of the data analysis.

Apart from that, it is argued that a bilingual interviewing approach can enhance the validity, and reliability of the collected data, as it would bring the participants a sense of confidence, security and comfort as well as give them a chance to be expressive and provide the information which would be challenging to communicate and therefore would be omitted (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004).

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed, with the approval of the participants. The interviews were coded, and relevant themes were identified throughout the texts. They were then analysed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) 6-step thematic analysis method (see 4.6), using the NVIVO12™ software program.

4.5.3 Stage 3 – Semi-Structured Interviews (Diners)

Semi-structured interviews (Appendix 85) were used to explore diners' perception of authenticity, their opinions and experience of different sensory strategies and their link with authenticity. The participants were chosen through quota sampling (n=20), with their ethnicity (Iranian=10 and non-Iranian=10) being the selection criteria. In this research, the participants with no previous experience of dining in Iranian restaurants are referred to as 'potential diners.' Dividing the diners into relevant quotas provided the research with a broad and reliable range of opinions, which developed an in-depth understanding of the subject matter (Veal, 2017).

Similar to the restaurateurs' interviews, the diners' interviews are also divided into several sections: First, the *background questions* were asked from the participants to provide a brief background of themselves (ethnicity, age, the number of years living in the UK, etc.), their familiarity with Iranian hospitality and/or culinary culture and their previous experience of dining at Iranian restaurants.

Examples:

- To begin, please talk a little about yourself.
- How familiar are you with the concept of Persian hospitality?
- Have you been to a Persian restaurant before? (if yes, can you tell me about your experience / if no, why?)

In the next step, *Perceptual questions* were used to investigate the diners' (current and potential) definition of authenticity and whether authenticity plays any role in their dining behaviour at ethnic restaurants.

Example:

-What is your definition of authenticity in regard to ethnic restaurants?

-To what degree does authenticity matter to you if you decide to dine in a Persian restaurant?

Finally, *procedural questions* were used to investigate the sensory elements influencing the diners' perceived authenticity when visiting an Iranian restaurant.

Example:

-Does it make any difference in your perception of authenticity if the menu is available in Farsi or not?

-What kind of music do you expect to hear in an authentic Iranian restaurant?

-Would it make any difference if the restaurant staff are Iranian or not?

The questions were designed based on the two concepts of food authenticity and environment authenticity; the measurement scales were adapted from Jang, Ha, and Park (2012).

All the interviews were recorded, with the approval of the participants, and were transcribed (see Appendix 7 for an example). Using the NVIVO 12™ software program, the interviews were then coded, and relevant themes were identified throughout the texts. They were then thematically analysed (see the following section below for the details of thematic analysis). The NVIVO software was

primarily used to ensure efficient data management and organization, while facilitating a structured and systematic coding process.

4.6 Data analysis method of the interview (Thematic Analysis)

The selection of the data analysis method is one of the crucial steps of conducting research, as it should align with “what the researcher wants to know” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80) and how the participants perceive the reality and communicate with the researcher. In this research, the participants’ experiences are vital in understanding how various phenomena are perceived; therefore, the data is derived from their opinions and perceptions.

Thematic analysis is acknowledged among the array of qualitative data analysis methods for its ability to identify, analyse, and present recurring themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016; Terry et al., 2017). Its primary function is to provide a structured framework for organising and describing data comprehensively. However, it is noteworthy that thematic analysis frequently extends beyond organisation and description and explores the interpretation of diverse dimensions of the research topic (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Boyatzis, 1998). The method’s versatility and capacity for significant interpretation make it a prominent choice in qualitative research.

Bryman (2008) highlights thematic analysis as one of the most widely adopted approaches for qualitative data analysis. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78) refer to it as the “foundational method for qualitative analysis” and Boyatzis (1998, p.1) addresses it as a “way of seeing”. These characterisations collectively emphasise the position of thematic analysis in qualitative research, underscoring its role as a well-regarded and comprehensive approach for generating patterns of

meaning through systematic coding processes. Thematic analysis is often perceived as a general analytical approach that offers a systematic, flexible, and accessible means to scrutinise qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022). The systematic approach of thematic analysis is linked to its orderly and logically structured process for analysing qualitative data, ultimately yielding rich descriptions, explanations, and theoretical insights (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023).

4.6.1 Thematic analysis process stages

The six steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022) served as the basis for the analysis process employed in the current study (Table 4.3). The following sections discuss how each thematic analysis step was performed in this study.

Table 4.3 The six phases of thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006; 2022)

Step	Description of the process
1 Data Familiarisation	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2 Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3 Generating initial Themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4 Reviewing and Developing Themes	Checking the theme's work in relation to the coded extracts and the data set.
5 Defining and Naming Themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6 Producing the Report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report.

Step 1 - Data Familiarisation

During the data familiarisation phase of this study, the researcher developed a profound and intimate understanding of the dataset by engaging with it in a critical

manner. It involved simultaneously adopting a strategy encompassing closeness (immersion) and distance (critical engagement). Immersion was achieved by engaging with the collected data in various ways, such as reading, listening, and watching, to gain a thorough familiarity with its content. Additionally, some of the interviews were conducted in Farsi, and the process of translating them into English provided an additional opportunity for data familiarisation (as outlined in section 4.5.2, Step II). The transcription of recorded interviews also served as a means of becoming even more acquainted with the collected data, as the researcher had to listen to each recording at least twice to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts generated by Microsoft Word's transcript feature. Making notes on specific parts or the entirety of the dataset, recording initial thoughts, and highlighting particular quotations from the interviews were other practical activities undertaken during the first phase, which allowed the researcher to reflect on the data early in the analysis process.

The researcher used analytic sensibility (Braun and Clarke, 2019) to blend immersion with critical engagement. This entailed actively exploring and interpreting the dataset to uncover deeper insights by relating the data's meaning to a wider context and the existing literature.

Step 2 - Generating initial codes

After familiarisation with the data, initial codes were created to capture the specific meanings through the data set. The coding process involved systematically working through each data item and the entire database (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

In this research, a mix of both approaches (inductive and deductive) was used concerning the coding process. The deductive coding was done based on the measures and theories that had already been identified through the general and systematic literature review, using them as “a lens through which a researcher interprets and makes sense of the data” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p57). However, the process was not limited to that, and an inductive approach was also employed to generate the data-driven codes. The generated codes were refined through multiple rounds of analysis, and as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022), all data sets were reviewed a minimum of two times.

Step 3 - Generating Initial Themes

A theme captures the “patterning” of meaning across the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to group the dataset into clusters which are united by a shared idea or evidence (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In other words, in this phase, the analysis starts to take form, and the focus is shifted from codes (meaningful units) to themes (meaningful patterns).

Braun and Clarke (2006) advise generating the initial themes when all data has been coded with its initial codes. In addition, Fotis (2015) states that categorising the codes is a necessary step before generating the themes. Therefore, in the current research, the relevant codes were first allocated to relatively general groups (e.g. each of the five human senses) and later used to develop the categories (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This helped the researcher to commence the theme generation with more confidence, as the codes were organised in meaningful categories. An important point to consider is the provisionality of the

initial codes and the fact that this phase of thematic analysis is mainly about shedding light on the potential road map of data analysis.

A thematic map (Figure 4.3) was developed to better visualise the dataset's provisional themes and the relationship between them. Thematic mapping served two main purposes in the current research. First, it allowed the researcher to better understand the patterns of meaning within the dataset, and second, it facilitated the identification and generation of the subthemes.

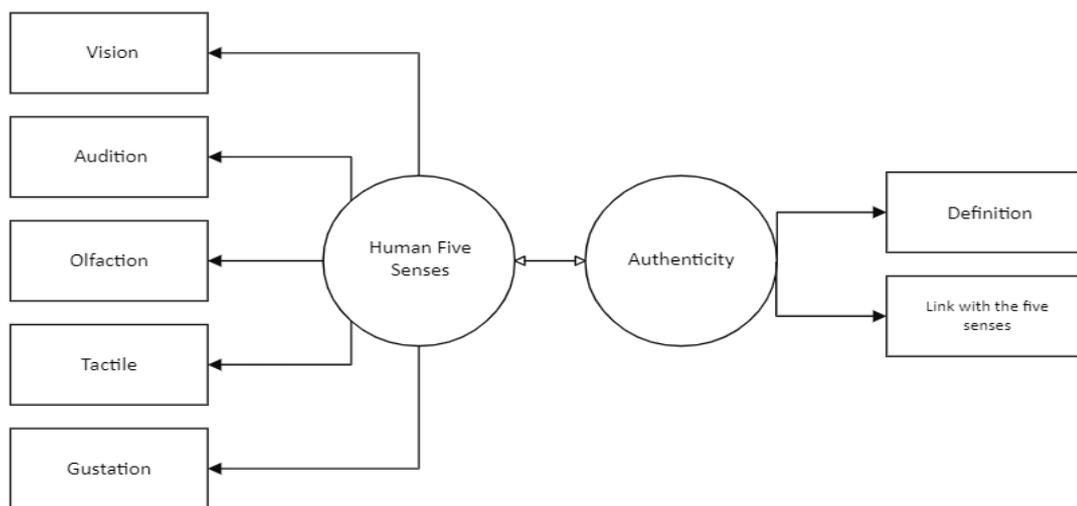


Figure 4.3 The initial thematic map of the research

Step 4 - Developing and Reviewing Themes

Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest that reviewing themes should only begin after all the initial themes for the analysis have been created. During this process, the researcher repeatedly referred to the transcripts to ensure that each theme was generated based on coherent and relevant analysis. The themes were then reviewed against the coded extracts (quotations) and the entire data set. To avoid information fragmentation, some of the initial themes were merged, while others were broken down to enhance the richness of the analysis.

Step 5 - Refining, Defining and Naming Themes

In thematic analysis, when defining and naming themes, it is crucial to choose informative, concise, and catchy names; otherwise, it can lead to misinterpretation (Braun, Clarke and Hayfield, 2023). In this study, some theme names were directly extracted from key quotations (e.g. It smells like home), while others were created based on the essence of each theme (e.g. Food has the final say (or not)). The researcher created engaging and creative names that were still clear and easy to understand and, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022), avoided one-word theme names to ensure that the “patterning of the meaning” was captured.

Step 6 - Producing the report

In thematic analysis, the analysis continues while the report is being written. Not only to refine the analysis and shape the detail and flow of it but also to “tell the whole analytic story” (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Considering that thematic analysis is recursive rather than linear, in this phase, the generated themes went through minor modifications to aid the analysis’s depth, flow and accuracy, and the researcher is not limited to the themes developed in the previous phase.

The report (analysis) was generated by discussing each theme and sub-theme and by providing the interviews’ key quotations to support the discussions (see CHAPTER 5 (sections 5.3-5.9) and CHAPTER 6 (sections 6.3-6-8)).

4.6.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, as emphasised in the scholarly literature (Greenbank, 2003; May and Perry, 2017), features the critical awareness researchers must maintain regarding their positionality. This entails a deliberate reflection and evaluation of one's perspectives and how these perspectives may consciously or unconsciously shape

the perception, execution, and interpretation of research findings. According to Bryman (2016) and Bourke (2014), effective reflexivity demands researchers to be conscious of their cultural, personal, and sociopolitical background, recognising that these factors, can impact the research process. Analytical reflections occur either during data collection or prior to the conceptualisation of the research. Nevertheless, maintaining reflexivity throughout the analysis phase and consistently questioning data interpretation mitigate the risk of superficial analysis.

Despite the assumed linearity of the 6-step thematic analysis, it is important to emphasise that this is not the case. Braun and Clarke (2022) state that reflexivity is integral to the thematic analysis process and is, therefore, a non-linear undertaking. In the current research, the researcher maintained continuous reflexivity by navigating between steps as needed to mitigate the influence of personal judgment throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases.

An illustrative instance of applying reflexivity to challenge the researcher's comprehension and perceptions of the gathered data involved incorporating specific prompting questions to elicit comprehensive information on potential themes, subthemes, and points of discussion. For instance, when participants mentioned the term '*tradition*', follow-up questions were introduced to inquire about their perspectives on the similarities and differences between *authenticity* and *tradition* so that the two concepts are not used interchangeably in the analysis. This approach was aimed to ensure that the information discussed was not solely based on the researcher's perceptions and assumptions.

Another employed strategy involved reflective journaling, where the researcher promptly recorded thoughts and ideas after each interview. Memos and/or audio recordings were created to capture the researcher's reflections on significant points discussed during the interviews and how these discussions contributed to the broader research context. Reflective journaling played a crucial role in the research process by enabling the researcher to capture and retain fresh insights, observations, and reflections, subsequently enhancing the researcher's memory recall of specific details, nuances, and participant responses (Ortlipp, 2008). Prompt memo writing also reduced the risk of bias or distortion in the researcher's memory, as waiting too long to document insights may lead to selective recall or unintentional alteration of details.

4.7 Data Evaluation

The applicability of reliability and validity as appropriate concepts to evaluate qualitative research has always been a matter of debate. Some scholars believe that the tests and measures used to establish the validity and reliability of quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative research (Noble and Smith, 2015). While quantitative researchers use statistical methods to establish the validity and reliability of their research, qualitative researchers design and incorporate methodological strategies to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of their findings (Stahl and King, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to clarify the meaning of reliability and validity and how this study examines these terms.

4.7.1 Dependability (Reliability)

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), in qualitative research, the concept of dependability closely aligns with the idea of reliability in quantitative research. In general, reliability refers to the degree to which consistent findings are pursued through data collection techniques or analysis procedures (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012; Yin, 2013). In the context of qualitative research, the term "reliability" often takes on a nuanced meaning, encompassing the adoption of research methods acknowledged by the research community as legitimate ways of collecting and analysing data.

While the absence of standardisation in methods like interviews may raise reliability/dependability concerns, it is crucial to acknowledge that outcomes from non-standardised research methods are not inherently meant to be replicable. Instead, these findings may capture the reality at a specific time and during the data collection period (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). Consequently, in qualitative research, the focus of reliability/dependability shifts from the rigid pursuit of identical results through repeated application of methods towards achieving consistent similarity in the quality of results. To maintain reliability/dependability, the process of qualitative research should be "logical, traceable and clearly documented" (Hannes, 2011, p.4).

4.7.2 Internal and External Validity (Credibility and Transferability)

Validity in research is a critical aspect, encapsulating the concern of whether the findings accurately represent what they purport to elucidate (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009). In qualitative research, the focus on validity revolves around the extent to which a finding is deemed to be correctly interpreted (Cho and Trent,

2006). Two distinct dimensions contribute to the evaluation of validity: internal validity, also known as credibility, and external validity, referred to as transferability. Internal validity scrutinises whether the researcher is indeed investigating what they perceive to be the subject matter, while external validity assesses the extent to which the findings can be applied to diverse settings and contexts (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Credibility, a fundamental factor of qualitative research, centres on researchers ensuring that participants' viewpoints are accurately reflected in the researchers' interpretations (Wood, Sebar, and Vecchio, 2020). Credibility is subject to inspection and can be reinforced through strategies such as member checks, peer debriefing, and persistent observation (Amin et al., 2020). In this study, continuous observation, and active engagement with the data (see Section 4.6.2 Reflexivity) were the primary strategies employed to maintain credibility.

Transferability within qualitative research concerns the extent to which study outcomes can be extended or applied to diverse contexts or settings. This prompts a fundamental query about whether qualitative findings possess a degree of generalisability comparable to that observed in quantitative research. Sandelowski, Docherty and Emden (1997) argue that in qualitative research, external validity/transferability “is directed toward naturalistic or idiographic generalisations” rather than a predictive one which is also supported by Yin (2013).

While reservations may arise regarding the credibility of qualitative research findings due to the utilisation of a limited and non-representative sample size compared to quantitative studies, these reservations can be mitigated by

employing specific methodological strategies. The current study incorporated the following strategies proposed by Noble and Smith (2015).

Firstly, the ongoing application of reflexivity, through the integration of constant critical reflection during data collection and analysis, along with meticulous record-keeping, was consistently practised to enhance research transparency (see 4.6.2).

To maintain research integrity, the researcher proceeded with all research steps with an awareness of potential biases that could influence the data collection, analysis, and discussion. To address this, information regarding researcher's background and stance towards the research is presented in section 1.10 .

To enhance the dependability and credibility of the research, the first two diners' interviews (I1 and NI1) served as the pilot phase. Two modifications were made to the interview guide: first, the addition of a prompting question regarding the interchangeable use of the terms 'authentic' and 'traditional'; second, the exclusion of a demographic question about the annual income of the participants, as it was not directly relevant to the research.

4.8 Ethical Consideration

This section provides information regarding the procedure adopted in the current study concerning research ethics. "Research ethics are concerned with moral behaviour in research contexts" (Wiles, 2012, p.4), and are about ensuring the suitability of researchers' conduct and protecting the rights of the participants of the study (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009). The research proposal was submitted to the University of West London ethics committee and was granted full approval with the unique reference number UWL/REC/SHT-0078.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and based on informed consent. All the participants were provided with the research information sheet (Appendices 3 and 8) and the data management form (Appendix 4) which informed them of the research purpose, the data management, and the contact details of the researcher, the principal supervisor and the University of West London ethics committee. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and all the collected data was only used for the purpose of research (see Appendix 89 for a list of research outputs). Consent for recording and photography was obtained through the research information sheet prior to the commencement of data collection. All the potential details -including but not limited to names, addresses, etc.- were coded and/or concealed to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

Some of the interviews and observations were carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed various challenges due to the protocols and health and safety measures in place at the time. Despite these challenges, health and safety protocols were carefully considered in all the stages, and the safety of the participants and the researcher was prioritised throughout the research.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical approach underpinning the research's methodology. It also provided a rationale behind the chosen methods and critically discussed the different stages and steps of the data collection. The data analysis method and steps were presented and discussed, followed by an evaluation of the undertaken methodology. The following chapters will cover the findings, analysis, discussion, and conclusion of the research.

CHAPTER 5 Restaurateurs, Authenticity and Sensory Strategies

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the population characteristics of the interviewed restaurateurs and a brief introduction of the restaurants, followed by an overview and discussion of the categories, themes, and subthemes that were extracted from the restaurateurs' interviews (Methodology Chapter, Section 4.5.2). The main objectives of these interviews were to explore and appraise the understanding of authenticity among restaurateurs in Iranian restaurants in London and to critically analyse the sensory strategies that Iranian restaurateurs adopt to improve the authentic experience of their customers.

A summary of the identified categories is presented below in Table 5.1. And the summary of the identified themes and subthemes is presented at the beginning of each category. Moreover, for ease of reference, the tables of key quotations related to each theme and subtheme are presented at the beginning of the discussion of each theme.

Table 5.1 Summary of the identified categories from the restaurateurs' interviews

No.	Category
1	Authenticity (Restaurateurs)
2	Visual Elements and Strategies
3	Auditory Elements and Strategies
4	Gustatory Elements and Strategies
5	Olfactory Elements and Strategies
6	Iranian Hospitality Culture

5.1 Participants' characteristics

The characteristics and demographics of the interviewed restaurateurs (n=9), including their code, position, age, gender, and professional background and a brief description of the restaurants⁷ are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Characteristics and demographics of the interviewed restaurateurs and their restaurants

No	Code	Position	Age	Gender	Professional background	Restaurant
1	RA	Owner	53	M	Started working in an Iranian restaurant for the first time after moving to the UK and later opened their own restaurant.	The restaurant is situated close to the high street alongside other Iranian restaurants and other Iranian-owned businesses. They have customers of different backgrounds and ethnicities due to their location. (Price range: ££-£££)
2	RB1	Owner & executive chef	65	M	Comes from generations of restaurant owners and chefs in Iran and has been working in the industry from a young age. They have been continuing their family business in the UK for more than 30 years.	The restaurant is situated in a quiet street, within a distance from the high street. They serve a group of loyal and established customers rather than having new customers every day. (Price range: ££-£££)
3	RB2	Floor Manager	55	F	Comes from generations of restaurant owners and chefs in Iran. They entered the industry by starting to manage the front-of-house of their family business in the UK	
4	RC	Owner	45	M	His main expertise is in another industry; however, they also has several years of experience in the food industry.	The restaurant is situated far from central London, with limited competition from other Iranian restaurants. (Price range: ££-£££)
5	RD	Floor Manager	N/G	M	Started their career as the front-of-house staff and was present at the restaurant from the day of its opening.	The restaurant is situated on a local street and consists of four unique dining rooms. (Price range: ££-£££)

⁷ The price ranges are taken from the restaurants' TripAdvisor pages (March 2024)

No	Code	Position	Age	Gender	Professional background	Restaurant
6	RE1	Co-founder	30	M	No previous experience of working in the restaurant industry. The decision to open the restaurant stemmed from personal dining experiences and identifying a niche for authentic Iranian cuisine within London's market.	The restaurant is situated close to central London is a quiet local street. They usually serve locals and mainly non-Iranians. (Price range: ££-£££)
7	RE2	Co-founder	42	M	No previous experience of working in the restaurant industry, however, they did own a few food-related businesses. The decision to open a restaurant was suggested by their business partner.	
8	RF	Co-founder and Head chef	43	F	No previous experience of working in the restaurant industry. Opened the restaurant as a family business when moving to the UK from Iran.	The restaurant is in a small town very close to London. The customers are often non-Iranians (Price range: ££-£££)
9	RG	Director	33	M	An experienced chef with years of experience in renowned restaurants, currently serving as the director of various branches of their restaurant. Iranian by heritage, they were born and raised in the UK.	Both London branches are situated in busy districts of Central London. (Price range: ££-£££)

5.2 Category 1 Authenticity (Restaurateurs)

A summary of the themes and subtheme related to category 1, Authenticity (Restaurateurs), extracted from the interviews (see section 4.5.2) can be found in Table 5.3. The first theme covers the interviewees' definition and perception of authenticity. The second theme investigates the challenges regarding the maintenance of authenticity as an ethnic restaurant operating far from the referent country are discussed and finally, in theme 3, the restaurateurs' thoughts about the link between authenticity and diners' ethnicity are explored.

Table 5.3 Summary of themes and subthemes related to category 1, Authenticity (Restaurateurs)

Category 1 – Authenticity (Restaurateurs)		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Definition and perception of authenticity	N/A
2	Authenticity far from the authentic source	Difficult to achieve Authenticity and Ethnicity

5.2.1 Theme 1 Definition and Perception of Authenticity

Theme 1 looks at the restaurateurs’ definition of authenticity both from a general perspective as well as concerning their profession. A summary of the key quotation of it is presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Summary of the subthemes and key quotations related to Category1, Theme 1, Definition of Authenticity

Category 1 – Authenticity (Restaurateurs)			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Definition and perception of Authenticity	N/A	<p>RA: Authenticity is to adhere to the background of humanity.</p> <p>RG: I think authenticity is interesting because authentic is subjective to the person, and I would say it’s authentic to me and my upbringing and my experience</p> <p>RC: Authenticity is in our behaviour, in our culture, in our food and many other things. In whatever that has a background of Esaalat and originality.</p> <p>RD: authenticity is all the traditional things that we have... Authenticity refers to the root and tradition is what we have from the past and it is linked with authenticity. In my opinion, they are almost similar.</p> <p>RC: ... when you say Esaalat what comes to mind are older things. For example, you say it is original, this Sony brand is original, and you think that it is from 50 years ago and the quality is good. Or when we say an individual is Aseel, one would assume that the father and grandfather are well-known and from famous families.</p>

It should be noted that while one of the most credible Farsi dictionaries, Aryanpour, (Aryanpour, nd) defines “authenticity” as genuine, not fake, accurate, reliable, etc., the term authenticity also translates as “traditional” in casual everyday Farsi

language. Throughout the interviews, the interviewees kept shifting back and forth between ‘the state of being genuine and original’ (RC) and ‘being traditional’ (RD).

RC: Authenticity is in our behaviour, in our culture, in our food and many other things. In whatever that has a background of Esaalat and originality.

RD: authenticity is all the traditional things that we have... Authenticity refers to the root and tradition is what we have from the past and it is linked with authenticity. In my opinion, they are almost similar.

Overall, authenticity as a quality in the business seemed to be a new phenomenon/concept and something they did not seem to have thought about before the interview, therefore defining it was also challenging for them. As an example, the owner of Restaurant B did not provide any definition, and the owner of Restaurant A (RA1), gave a very general definition of authenticity although being asked to define it regarding their own business:

RA1: Authenticity is to adhere to the background of humanity.

After several instances of mentioning the terms Aseel⁸ (اصیل) or Esaalat⁹ (اصالت), when discussing ‘authenticity’, the interviewees were asked to define the Farsi terms and clarify any potential similarity or distinction with ‘authenticity’.

An interesting definition of the term Esaalat (اصالت) was presented by interviewee RC, where they provided an example of a well-known brand -Sony™-. In this case, the word was synonymous with ‘originality’ and ‘higher quality’ of something with has been consistently existing for a long period of time. This was supported by another example of attributing the term to individuals from a well-known and famous family and heritage.

⁸ / æ'si:l/

⁹ / e'sa:læət/

RC: ...When you say Esaalat what comes to mind are older things. For example, you say it is original, this Sony brand is original, and you think that it is from 50 years ago and the quality is good. Or when we say an individual is Aseel, one would assume that the father and grandfather are well-known and from famous families.

5.2.2 Theme 2 – Authenticity far from the authentic source

In the second theme, the challenges that restaurateurs face in order to maintain authenticity are identified and discussed. A summary of the relevant key quotations is presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Summary of Category1, Theme 2, Authenticity far from the authentic source, and its key quotations

Category 1 – theme 2 Authenticity far from the authentic source			
No.	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	Authenticity far from the authentic source	Difficult to achieve	<p>RA: No one can ever be 100% successful [in regard to authenticity].</p> <p>RB1: Authenticity is a bit different here [in the UK] because you cannot maintain that authenticity.</p> <p>RA: We cannot do it.... The plates are not Iranian. The plates and the tableware are all bought here.</p> <p>RG: I think the restaurant has to be balanced. It has. To be a balance of authenticity and actually feasible, you know, accessible. So, I don't think you can. You can open a restaurant if they can just be 100%. And it could be revolved and based around 100% authenticity, but that doesn't always translate into an accessible or commercial idea, so. You know, some things are authentic, but I'm not the...they're not loved by everyone. So, there are many dishes that are very authentic but quite unique and somebody that. Let's try. Persian food for the first time. My it's not the best way to introduce them to pleasure.</p>
		Authenticity and Ethnicity	<p>RA: One would inevitably be attracted to the side that their culture, style and authentic (self) is.... When you see 'Restooran e Irani'...it feels like coming out of sea (sense of relive) and makes you feel good.</p>

5.2.2.1 Subtheme – Difficult to achieve

Restaurateurs believe that communicating authenticity and maintaining it is more challenging for them compared to the Iranian restaurants located in Iran since their business is located far from the referent country (RB1). These challenges can

affect authenticity to the point that it can be impossible to offer a completely authentic experience (RA).

RB1: Authenticity is a bit different here [in the UK] because you cannot maintain that authenticity.

RA: No one can ever be 100% successful.

The same point was also mentioned when the restaurateurs were talking about other elements of their restaurants like having all Iranian staff or using Iranian tableware. They expressed that due to the lack of access to the ideal resources it would be challenging to have a 100% authentic experience. However, it is very important to note that the interviewees seemed to be only talking about the objective perspective of authenticity (e.g. the manufacturing place of the tableware), and not about the fact that authenticity can be constructed. To clarify this, when they were asked whether a similar product which is produced in the UK can be counted as authentic the answer was negative.

RA: We cannot do it... The plates are not Iranian. The plates and the tableware are all bought here.

RA: I think it is not authentic.

Another critical point, which is more of an informed choice rather than an inevitable factor, is restaurateurs' decision to adjust their offering based on the characteristics and demand of the target market. This decision should be made by considering a balance between feasibility, accessibility, and authenticity of the offering to suit commercial requirements.

RG: I think the restaurant has to be balanced. It has. To be a balance of authenticity and actually feasible, you know, accessible. So, I don't think you can. You can open a restaurant if they can just be 100%. And it could be revolved and based around 100% authenticity, but that doesn't always translate into an accessible or commercial idea, so. You know,

some things are authentic, but I'm not the....they're not loved by everyone. So, there are many dishes that are very authentic but quite unique and somebody that.... Let's try Persian food for the first time... it's not the best way to introduce them to pleasure.

5.2.2.2 Subtheme – Authenticity and Ethnicity

Ethnicity and the fact that an individual belongs to the culture that the ethnic restaurant is addressing can play a role in recognising authentic elements and being attracted to the restaurant. In this case, the restaurateurs believe that one of the reasons that Iranian people would be attracted to Iranian restaurants is that it would remind them of their origin, roots, and culture. Therefore, any sign from *home* (authentic elements) can bring those living far from their home country a sense of comfort, security, and relief.

RA: One would inevitably be attracted to the side that their culture, style and authentic (self) is.... When you see 'Restooran e Irani'...it feels like coming out of the sea (sense of relief) and makes you feel good.

While this can mean that Iranian individuals could be more interested in visiting authentic Iranian restaurants, it can be argued that this is in contrast with the ongoing change that has emerged in the dining behaviours of individuals - regardless of their ethnicity- and that society is moving towards choosing restaurants based on having new experiences (Cao et al., 2019).

5.3 Category 2 Visual Elements and Strategies

A summary of the themes and subthemes related to category 2, Visual elements, and strategies, can be found in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Summary of Category 2, Visual Elements and Strategies and the theme and subthemes related to the different categories.

Category 2 – Visual Elements and Strategies		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Exterior design, name, and signage	'رستوران ایرانی' 'Iranian Restaurant' or 'Restaurant'?
		Hello, My name is...
2	Interior design and decoration	Come and "see" our home
		Home is where the inspiration comes from
3	Restaurant Staff	A black T-shirt will do the job
		Iranian staff or non-Iranian staff?
4	The plate is as important as the food in it (or not)	N/A
5	We eat with our eyes	N/A
6	In large portions we trust	N/A
7	What is on the menu?	Ghormeh Sabzi has its own personality
		Menu language
		Food items

5.3.1 Theme 1 - Exterior Design and Name and Signage

Theme 1, exterior design, name, and signage, explores the restaurateurs' opinions and experiences in regard to the process of selecting the exterior elements of the restaurant and the reasons behind their choices. A summary of the subthemes and key quotations can be found in

Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 Summary of the subthemes and key quotations for Category2, Theme 1, Exterior Design, Name and Signage

Category 2, Theme 1, Exterior Design, Name and Signage			
N	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
1	Exterior design, Name and Signage	'رستوران ایرانی' 'Iranian Restaurant' or 'Restaurant'?	<p>RA: I should be first a representative of an Iranian restaurant from my signage.... When you see 'Restooran e Irani' [Iranian restaurant] ...it feels like coming out of sea (sense of relive) and makes you feel good.</p> <p>RB1: We do not need it. Because Iranians know our restaurant.... I do not think that anyone needs to write in Farsi anymore.</p> <p>RC: It [the signage] also includes the Farsi version to attract the Iranian people. And for them to quickly tell that there is an Iranian restaurant there.</p> <p>RD: back when the restaurant was opened there were not that many Iranian restaurants in London and all the Iranian restaurants had their signage in English. We are traditional and what is our traditional language? Farsi! We are at a traditional Iranian restaurant and should have [the signage] in Farsi. The Farsi signage was a question mark to everyone... if it was in English, they may just pass by, but if it is in Farsi. They wonder what is written and this can stop them for five minutes and they might ask a couple of people, and this would make the name stick.</p> <p>RG: [The signage is in English only] because we're. In England. Yeah, I think. The aesthetic of the inside of the restaurant is not to pull people into the restaurant, right? Your messaging needs to be clear, people. Needs to know what you are. What your name is and again it goes back to us being a restaurant for everyone and not just for Iranians.</p> <p>RF: English is an international language and even if I am in Iran I know the language as an international language. Yes, the ESAALAT of us Iranians is in our Farsi language but the reason that it [the signage] is [in English] is because English is an international language and secondly the high cost.... I would absolutely include the Farsi and the English version if I ever want to change the signage.</p> <p>RD: back when the restaurant was opened there were not that many Iranian restaurants in London and all the Iranian restaurants had their signage in English. We are traditional and what is our traditional language? Farsi! We are at a traditional Iranian restaurant and should have [the signage] in Farsi. The Farsi signage was a question mark to everyone... if it was in English, they may just pass by, but if it is in Farsi. They wonder what is written and this can stop them for five minutes and they might ask a couple of people, and this would make the name stick.</p>

	<p>RE1: [the signage is in English], but the O has a Persian O on top of it, which is a vowel of O, and we get a lot of questions.... It basically initiates a conversation about a different alphabet that so many people don't even know that Iranians have a different alphabet as a default. They think every alphabet is basically the same and then it initiates so we tell our waiters to be aware of this they come up so then you start talking about the Persian alphabet. You might even show them a few things. You tell them that it's right to left and not left to write.</p>
<p>Hello, My name is...</p>	<p>RC: I told myself, let's teach people a Farsi word. We are learning many things, so it is good to teach as well. And I wanted it to be linked to food... It is a Farsi word and makes me feel very good.</p> <p>RA: The customer may come in because of that one word that they do not have an idea about, they come in because they find that out.</p>

5.3.1.1 Subtheme - Restaurant or Iranian Restaurant or رستوران ایرانی¹⁰

Restaurateurs have contrasting opinions about having restaurant signage printed in the Farsi language. One of the restaurateurs (RA) believed that a Farsi signage is a way of showcasing the culture, as the very first point of contact with their customers. Also seeing a Farsi signage could not only attract potential Iranian customers but also can bring them a sense of security and confidence by showcasing a familiar element.

RA: I should be first a representative of a Persian restaurant from my signage... When you see 'Restooran e Irani'...it feels like coming out of sea (sense of relief) and makes you feel good.

RC: It [the signage] also includes the Farsi version to attract the Iranian people. And for them to quickly tell that there is an Iranian restaurant there.

RD: back when the restaurant was opened there were not that many Iranian restaurants in London and all the Iranian restaurants had their signage in English. We are traditional and what is our traditional language? Farsi! We are at a traditional Iranian restaurant and should have [the signage] in Farsi. The Farsi signage was a question mark to everyone... if it was in English, they may just pass by, but if it is in Farsi. They wonder what is written and this can stop them for five minutes and they might ask a couple of people, and this would make the name stick.

¹⁰ Translation: Iranian Restaurant

Another restaurateur expressed that since the restaurant has regular Iranian customers, they do not need to have Farsi signage. This can mean that a group of service providers only look at the basic purpose of the sensory elements – in this case, signage to only show the name of the restaurant- and are not aware of the extended role of sensory elements as strategies that can be utilised for specific purposes.

RB1: We do not need it. Because Persians know our restaurant.... I do not think that anyone needs to write in Farsi anymore.

Several of the restaurants had their signage in English only, and the main reason given for that was the official language of the United Kingdom being English, therefore the restaurateurs did not see any need to include the Farsi version on the signage as all the potential customers would be able to read the English writing.

RG: [The signage is in English only] because we're in England. Yeah, I think. The aesthetic of the inside of the restaurant is not to pull people into the restaurant, right? Your messaging needs to be clear, people. Needs to know what you are. What your name is and again it goes back to us being a restaurant for everyone and not just for Iranians.

RF: English is an international language and even if I am in Iran I know the language as an international language. Yes, the ESAALAT of us Iranians is in our Farsi language but the reason that it [the signage] is [in English] is because English is an international language and secondly the high cost.... I would absolutely include the Farsi and the English version if I ever want to change the signage.

One of the restaurateurs took a creative approach to designing their signage. They wrote the restaurant's name in English but also incorporated some elements from the Farsi language by adding Farsi vowels. This not only adds an Iranian touch but also serves as a conversation starter for their non-Iranian customers, who may be unfamiliar with the language.

RE1: [the signage is in English], but the O has a Persian O on top of it, which is a vowel of O, and we get a lot of questions.... It basically

initiates a conversation about a different alphabet that so many people don't even know that Iranians have a different alphabet as a default. They think every alphabet is basically the same and then it initiates so we tell our waiters to be aware of this they come up so then you start talking about the Persian alphabet. You might even show them a few things. You tell them that it's right to left and not left to write.

5.3.1.2 Subtheme – Hello, my name is...

All the restaurants included in this research had Farsi names. One of the main reasons behind the restaurant's name choice was to use it as an opportunity to teach a Farsi word to non-Iranians (RC). Restaurateurs also believe that a Farsi word written in English alphabets (Finglish) has the power to spark the curiosity of potential diners and could be the initial reason for them to visit the restaurant (RA).

RC: I told myself, let's teach people a Farsi word. We are learning many things, so it is good to teach as well. And I wanted it to be linked to food... It is a Farsi word and makes me feel very good.

RA: The customer may come in because of that one word that they do not have an idea about, they come in because they find that out.

5.3.2 Theme 2 - Interior Design and Decoration

Theme 2 covers the two subthemes related to the interior design and decoration of restaurants. First, the role of the interior design as a tool to showcase the Iranian culture is discussed and then the role of decoration to bring a sense of homeness to the restaurant is investigated. Table 5.8, presents a summary of the subthemes and the key quotations.

Table 5.8 Summary of Category 2, Theme 2, Interior Design and Decoration, its subthemes, and key quotations

Category 2, Theme 2, Interior Design and Decoration			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations

2	Interior design and decoration		RA: It is more non-Iranians; Iranian customers are familiar with it.
			RA: Customers (non-Iranian) become very happy because of the décor.
			RD: one of the reasons for having Tanoor was that it attracts a lot of attention, and the reason we positioned it in the sight and at the front is because Tanoor is our Tradition and ESAALAT and people who are passing by would see and like it.
		Come and “see” our home	RA: This is exactly (showing) the Iranian culture, so people know how we make bread in our country. RC: [pointing to the back wall where Iranian products are displayed and are available to purchase]. Many customers [non-Iranian] say that we did not know that Iranians have toasted sunflower seeds or pickles or the drink that we have the non-alcoholic beer they really like it, so I thought to myself let’s introduce them. It is not only the food.
			RF: We are an Iranian restaurant, and we have to showcase things from Iran. We have pictures from Iran. We also have some books about Esfahan, Gilan and Tehran.
			RG: Just by looking at decorations at home, looking at long-standing traditions, a lot of woodwork. You know, a lot of crafts, a lot of both, made a lot. Of hard materials. A lot. I had it a lot of hard metals and you know, like traditionally like for example, the carpet on the wall, the expensive carpets in Iran business, such a luxury. They hold on the walls so. They not destroyed at home. So, they don't get dirty and it's a status. Symbol instead of hanging carpets from the wall because it's not really hygiene. Well, we had it painted on already exposed before.
	Home is where the inspiration comes from	RC: Good! excellent! sense of home like mom’s food! RC: I was after creating that atmosphere so when the customer comes to have Iranian food, they feel like visiting a small part of the country. RB1: Some restaurants like the décor to be very authentic [traditional], maybe I am wrong, but I do not like it, it is too much.... They are all the same. RD: those who are quite religious only see the front and they say oh their food is like this or that... this [religious painting and symbols] attracts them to the restaurant and this kind of customer likes these things and you would normally do what the custom like and move towards that.	

5.3.2.1 Subtheme - Come and “see” our home

Some of the service providers are only focused on the impact of the interior design and the Iranian elements used in the decorations on the non-Iranian customers and believe that they are not a priority for Iranian customers as they are familiar with these elements and there is nothing new or interesting for Iranians to be attracted to.

RA: It is more non-Iranians; Iranian customers are familiar with it.

They also believe that the visible positioning of Iranian elements can be a strategy to showcase the ethnic culture to those who are not familiar with it and attract them to the restaurant.

RD: one of the reasons for having Tanoor was that it attracts a lot of attention, and the reason we positioned it in the sight and at the front is because Tanoor is our Tradition and ESAALAT and people who are passing by would see and like it.

RA: This is exactly (showing) the Iranian culture, so people know how we make bread in our country.

The interior design and decorative elements of Iranian ethnic restaurants are also used as a strategy to showcase Iranian culture and products to non-Iranian diners. An interesting point is that the restaurateurs concentrate on non-Iranian diners and, in this case, take the significance of their Iranian diners for granted.

RC: [pointing to the back wall where Iranian products are displayed and are available to purchase]. Many customers [non-Iranian] say that we did not know that Iranians have toasted sunflower seeds or pickles or the drink that we have the non-alcoholic beer they really like it, so I thought to myself let's introduce them. It is not only the food.

RF: We are an Iranian restaurant, and we have to showcase things from Iran. We have pictures from Iran. We also have some books about Esfahan, Gilan and Tehran.

5.3.2.2 Subtheme - Home is where the inspiration comes from

The interior design of Iranian restaurants is usually inspired by the restaurateurs' personal experiences and observations of Iranian households. They believe that the ultimate design is one that evokes a sense of home for Iranian diners or transports non-Iranian diners to Iran.

RC: I was after creating that atmosphere so when the customer comes to have Iranian food, they feel like visiting a small part of the country.

RC: Good! excellent! sense of home like mom's food!

Interviewee RD was the only person who mentioned using religious paintings and symbols to attract certain diners to their restaurant. In this case, such decorative elements were not only for visual purposes but also to communicate specific messages, such as offering particular types of food (e.g. Halal) or adhering to specific beliefs (e.g. the absence of alcoholic drinks).

RD: those who are quite religious only see the front and they say oh their food is like this or that... this [religious painting and symbols] attracts them to the restaurant and this kind of customer likes these things and you would normally do what the custom like and move towards that.

One of the restaurateurs was inspired by the placement of decorative rugs on walls in the Iranian culture and sought to incorporate this aesthetic into their restaurants. However, to make this practice commercially viable (maintenance and hygiene), they transformed these physical textiles into painting versions of the rug patterns.

RG: Just by looking at decorations at home, looking at long-standing traditions, a lot of woodwork. You know, a lot of crafts, a lot of both, made a lot. Of hard materials. A lot. I had it a lot of hard metals and you know, like traditionally like for example, the carpet on the wall, the expensive carpets in Iran business, such a luxury. They hold on the walls so. They not destroyed at home. So, they don't get dirty and it's a status. Symbol instead of hanging carpets from the wall because it's not really hygiene. Well, we had it painted on already exposed before.

Another important point regarding the interior design of the restaurants is that some restaurants use the same typical Iranian elements (e.g. Iranian rug, Persepolis statues, etc.) in their interior design without any creativity or uniqueness. These sorts of blind imitations can be perceived as “copy and paste,” fake, and ultimately inauthentic. This point mentioned by RB1 was one of the few instances that which a restaurateur seemed to be referring to authenticity as the state of being original rather than traditional.

RB1: Some restaurants like the décor to be very authentic [traditional], maybe I am wrong, but I do not like it, it is too much.... They are all the same.

5.3.3 Theme 3 – Restaurant’s staff

Theme 3 explores the restaurateurs’ opinions and insights about the choice of staff uniforms as well as the role of staff ethnicity in the recruitment process. A summary of the subthemes and key quotations can be found in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 Summary of the subtheme and key quotations related to Category 2, Theme 3, Restaurant’s Staff

Category 2, Theme 3 Restaurant’s staff			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
3	Restaurant’s staff		RB1: ... we never thought about these things.
			RB2: We have not thought about that.
		A black T-shirt will do the job!	RG: we always knew when a T-shirt and we always knew we wanted to just be comfortable before looking good. We like to use a lot of reference gold because it screams luxury and opinions and you know, Iran has a lot of gold. Has a material. It has high value and I thought. Scream luxury, we. Yeah. So, we went from white T-shirts to black T-shirts with gold and no, it's quite an open thing.
			RA: Look we cannot do it... it is much better to explain everything to the customer.
		RB1: The kitchen staff have to be Iranian.	
		RC: They must be Iranian for example if they taste Ghormeh Sabzi they can tell how it is but how would the foreigner know this?	
	Iranian staff or non-Iranian staff?	RG: No, we never look at ethnicity. We always hire on the individual.	
		RB2: When live here [in the UK], we have to consider that they also go to other restaurants and this [staff nationality] is not an important thing in having good service.	
		RF: I do not like categorising things being Iranian is an honour for me, but I do not like categorising things.	

5.3.3.1 Subtheme - A black T-shirt will do the job

Restaurateurs mainly prioritise hygiene, comfort, and the fact that the staff should always be presentable and neat. As a result, like many other hospitality establishments, dark colours such as black are a popular choice. While some restaurants may incorporate elements of Iranian culture through the use of particular colours or patterns (e.g. RG), overall, restaurateurs do not place a high priority on the design of their staff uniforms.

RG: we always knew when a T-shirt and we always knew we wanted to just be comfortable before looking good. We like to use a lot of reference gold because it screams luxury and opinions and you know, Iran has a lot of gold. Has a material. It has high value and I thought. Scream luxury, we. Yeah. So, we went from white T-shirts to black T-shirts with gold and no, it's quite an open thing.

RB1: ... we never thought about these things...

RB2: We have not thought about that.

5.3.3.2 Subtheme - Iranian staff or non-Iranian staff?

Aiming to recruit an entire team of Iranian employees can be very challenging for restaurants outside Iran. This can leave the business with few to limited options when it comes to staff recruitment.

RA: We cannot do it.

According to the restaurateurs, there is no correlation between the ethnicity of their staff and customers' perception of authenticity. However, some restaurateurs prefer hiring Iranian staff, given the belief that individuals from similar cultures or ethnicities can answer customer queries more efficiently.

RA: ... it is much better to explain everything to the customer.

Many restaurateurs believe that recruiting front-of-house employees solely based on their ethnicity is not a desirable or acceptable practice. They suggest that professional qualities and skills beyond ethnicity are of greater importance in hiring decisions.

RG: No, we never look at ethnicity. We always hire on the individual.

RB2: When live here [in the UK], we have to consider that they also go to other restaurants and this [staff nationality] is not an important thing in having good service.

RF: I do not like categorising things being Iranian is an honour for me, but I do not like categorising things.

A common belief among restaurateurs is that a good-quality and authentic Iranian dish can only be expertly prepared by an Iranian chef. Consequently, many restaurateurs are hesitant to invest in training non-Iranian chefs, as it is considered to be a costly endeavour.

RB1: The kitchen staff have to be Iranian.

RC: They must be Iranian for example if they taste Ghormeh Sabzi they can tell how it is but how would the foreigner know this?

5.3.4 Theme 4 –The plate is as important as the food in it (or not)

Theme 4 investigates the opinions and experiences of restaurateurs about tableware and any potential links with authenticity. A summary of the theme’s key quotations is presented in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 Summary of Category 2, Theme 2, The plate is as important as the food in it (or not)

Category 2, Theme 4, The plate is as important as the food in it (or not)			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations

4	The plate is as important as the food in it (or not)	N/A	<p>RD: if you look at [these plates] now they're all Zarrin China and we brought from Iran. It is less expensive and people like it when someone has not been to Iran for 20 years and they turn the plate and say oh it's Zarrin China. Because non-Iranians do not know what it is, but Iranians do, and it is kind of a reminder of Iran, and something happens in their mind. It is all traditional. We try to keep the authenticity for us, and the people and it is an easy action so our customers can be always reminded of Iran.</p> <p>RG: you know the cutlery pot is actually a Dizi pot, which is something that... is a pot we cook in.</p> <p>RB2: They are more beautiful and look better.</p> <p>RA: The plates are not (authentic) Iranian. The plates and the tableware are all bought here (in the UK).</p> <p>RA: If it chips or breaks, we cannot replace or repair it on the spot, so it is better to use what the majority uses.</p> <p>RF: I chose them all myself from the most ASEEL Iranian, chinaware which is Zarrin and brought them all from Iran.... it for sure has an impact. you can get plates from anywhere, but we wanted to tell our customers that our job is important to us and from A-Z if you want to have the ESAALAT.... and the plate that is on your table is as important as the food you are having in the plate.</p>
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Tableware -either decorative or practical- is sometimes used as a tool to showcase Iranian culture or to act as a bridge to connect Iranian customers back to their home country. Restaurateurs approach the use of Iranian tableware differently. It is either using the tableware for their actual purpose (RD) or the creative use of different elements for a different purpose (RG).

RD: if you look at [these plates] now they're all Zarrin China and we brought from Iran. It is less expensive and people like it when someone has not been to Iran for 20 years and they turn the plate and say oh it's Zarrin China. Because non-Iranians do not know what it is, but Iranians do, and it is kind of a reminder of Iran, and something happens in their mind. It is all traditional. We try to keep the authenticity for us, and the people and it is an easy action so our customers can be always reminded of Iran.

RG: you know the cutlery pot is actually a Dizi pot, which is something that... is a pot we cook in.

The use of tableware with an Iranian touch is not always intended as a strategic means to communicate specific messages but rather as a means to enhance a

restaurant's aesthetic appeal. Therefore, some restaurateurs see the application of such tableware as a way to augment the visual presentation of the food rather than a tool to convey intended meanings.

RB2: They are more beautiful and look better.

The interviewees were asked if they think authentic tableware is only those bought in Iran or if the items designed and manufactured out of Iran (in this case, the UK) can also be considered authentic. One of the interviewees expressed that since the tableware had not been purchased from Iran, they were not authentic (RA), and another restaurateur expressed that for them, ordering the tableware from Iran was a way of showing their care and *Esaalat* to their customers. This mindset can be linked to the concept of objective authenticity (Jones, 2009), which defines and measures authenticity through set criteria and measurable standards.

RA: The plates are not (authentic) Iranian. The plates and the tableware were all bought here (in the UK).

RF: I chose them all myself from the most Aseel Iranian, chinaware which is Zarrin and brought them all from Iran.... it for sure has an impact. you can get plates from anywhere, but we wanted to tell our customers that our job is important to us and from A-Z if you want to have the *ESAALAT*.... and the plate that is on your table is as important as the food you are having in the plate.

The interviewees mentioned on several occasions that the difficulty of access makes it almost impossible for Iranian restaurants in the UK to rely on importing their tableware from Iran. Therefore, the next best option for them is to use classic restaurant tableware, which is universally available.

RA: If it chips or breaks, we cannot replace or repair it on the spot, so it is better to use what the majority uses.

5.3.5 Theme 5 – We eat with our eyes!

Theme 5 investigates the restaurateurs' mindset about the presentation of the food served at their restaurant, and whether it has any potential link to authenticity. The key quotations linked to this theme are presented in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11 Summary of the key quotations related to Category 2, Theme 5, We eat with our eyes

Category 2, Theme 5, We eat with our eyes!			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
5	We eat with our eyes	N/A	<p>RA: The way we serve our food is 100% Iranian.</p> <p>RB1: Talking about authenticity, the rice was never moulded [in Iran]. We had a restaurant [in Iran] and I took this style from there.</p> <p>RG: Yeah, I don't think. What we've done is just tidied up a bit. we've removed anything that we didn't think was necessary for your meal. Anything that the Iranian restaurants serve, we thought unnecessary. We need to like a handful of chips, handful of Khiarshoor (pickles) or a handful of red cabbage, a handful of mixed salad bag with a couple of cherry tomatoes. Some people, but whatever.... And then you know there's all sorts of stuff... Torshi Sir (pickled garlic) for some reason I've seen on some platters. we only incorporated the things on the plate which needs to be eaten with the Kabab. So... Sangak (bread) is something that SangaK bread is something... is the bread that is eaten with Kabab. Additionally, grilled tomatoes, onions, lemon. That's it! I can't think of anything that's more authentic about this.</p>

Authentic Iranian food presentation seemed to be an important factor for the interviewees, The owner of restaurant A, stated that they always emphasise a completely authentic food presentation and went into detail by describing the presentation of several of their menu items to the researcher.

RA: The way we serve our food is 100% Iranian.

Another restaurant also employs a similar practice, albeit with a slight variation. They prioritize adding only relevant, essential, and original sides and garnishes to their dishes while avoiding the common maximalist practice of some other restaurants. According to them, this approach ensures that the dishes are not overburdened with unnecessary items and helps to maintain authenticity.

RG: Yeah, I don't think. What we've done is just tidied up a bit. we've removed anything that we didn't think was necessary for your meal. Anything that the Iranian restaurants serve, we thought unnecessary. We need to like a handful of chips, handful of Khiarshoor (pickles) or a

handful of red cabbage, a handful of mixed salad bag with a couple of cherry tomatoes. Some people, but whatever.... And then you know there's all sorts of stuff... Torshi Sir (pickled garlic) for some reason I've seen on some platters. we only incorporated the things on the plate which needs to be eaten with the Kabab. So... Sangak (bread) is something that Sangak bread is something... is the bread that is eaten with Kabab. Additionally, grilled tomatoes, onions, lemon. That's it! I can't think of anything that's more authentic about this.

To obtain further information regarding food presentation, during some of the interviews, the interviewees were asked about their opinion on a newly introduced way of serving rice in Iranian restaurants, which involves moulding rice into different shapes. Most of the restaurateurs did not agree with this practice. One common reason they stated was that it does not align with the traditional Iranian culinary culture and is not something seen in Iran. This once again, highlights the dual meaning of the term “authenticity” in the Farsi language and the fact that “originality” is usually closely tied to “tradition”.

RB1: Talking about authenticity, the rice was never moulded [in Iran]. We had a restaurant [in Iran] and I took this style from there.

5.3.6 Theme 6 - In large portions we trust

Theme 6 explores the portion sizes of food, restaurateurs' beliefs regarding acceptable portion sizes, and the strategies they utilize to maintain authenticity while also meeting market standards. A summary of the relevant key quotations can be found in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Summary of the key quotations related to Category 2, Theme 6, In large portions we trust

Category 2, Theme 6, In large portions we trust!			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations

6	In large portions we trust	N/A	<p>RA: You would not be able to finish one portion of it.</p> <p>RB2: We tell [the kitchen] to put more rice for those customers that we know.... We tell them [diners] to let us know if they want more rice and then would ask them again in the middle of their meal.</p> <p>RC: big and full (portion)... it does not mean that those restaurants that are working in a modern style.... that it would not work.... it is even nice.... but the traditional one is more successful.... In my opinion, it all goes back to the root and the ESAALAT the more traditional the better especially Persian food which always should be in big portions and the traditional way of it would work better.</p> <p>RD: They [the food portions] are very big majority of the time the customers tell us that we cannot finish it so please bring us a container to take it away. 90 to 95% of our customers take the rest of their food away. It feels very good when I walk around the restaurant and see that they keep asking for takeaway boxes. This shows that they use the food like it and want to take the rest home.</p> <p>RE1: So, the culinary they know the culinary formation the culinary skilled the culinary plate is how it should be in England so it's weird if we serve it as they eat in Iran but like two big skewers and loads of rice and everything it doesn't make sense for them, and we don't have good feedback. In the beginning, we went to the Iranian way of doing it, and our regular customers commented; 'This is too much. This is for three of us. This rice is like... it's a lot of rice. so slowly we found the balance between these two.'</p>
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As mentioned earlier in the section 2.5, serving big portions of food is a sign of the host's Ehteram (respect) and Ahammiat (care) for the guest and when it comes to restaurants and food businesses Keyfiat (quality) and Arzesh (worth) are the other two qualities that are evaluated by the portion size. Therefore, big portion sizes can be an indication of having an authentic experience in Iranian restaurants.

There is a difference of opinion among restaurateurs with regard to food portions, which sometimes leads to contrasting views being expressed. A number of the interviewees seemed to be actively practising the offering of large portions, and in some cases, they were even proud of the fact that their food portions were too large that the customers would not be able to finish them (RA & RD). This is a typical practice in Iranian hospitality culture, where 'More is More.' Serving generous portions that the guest cannot finish is a sign of respect and the food is

even sometimes perceived as higher quality only because of the portion size (very similar to value for money). To this group of restaurateurs, larger portions equal more traditional practices, which can consequently lead to a more authentic offering (RC).

RA: You would not be able to finish one portion of it.

RD: They [the food portions] are very big majority of the time the customers tell us that we cannot finish it so please bring us a container to take it away. 90 to 95% of our customers take the rest of their food away. It feels very good when I walk around the restaurant and see that they keep asking for takeaway boxes. This shows that they use the food like it and want to take the rest home.

RC: big and full (portion)... it does not mean that those restaurants that are working in a modern style.... that it would not work.... it is even nice.... but the traditional one is more successful.... In my opinion, it all goes back to the root and the ESAALAT the more traditional the better especially Persian food which always should be in big portions and the traditional way of it would work better.

The difference in opinion regarding serving large portions is associated with non-Iranian customers and how they may find it odd or unpleasant. Interviewee RE1 shared the gradual modification and reduction of their portion sizes based on customer feedback, as their diners had expressed dissatisfaction about the large portion size of their orders. However, it's important to note that their restaurant is mainly visited by non-Iranians, and the same practice can have a different effect in other restaurants with different clientele.

RE1: So, the culinary they know the culinary formation the culinary skilled the culinary plate is how it should be in England so it's weird if we serve it as they eat in Iran but like two big skewers and loads of rice and everything it doesn't make sense for them [Iranian diners], and we don't have good feedback. In the beginning, we went to the Iranian way of doing it, and our regular customers commented; 'This is too much. This is for three of us. This rice is like... it's a lot of rice. so slowly we found the balance between these two.

Some restaurateurs have come up with a unique strategy to avoid food waste caused by large portions. Rather than serving everyone large portions, they serve everyone a standard portion of rice. Then, they ask the kitchen to send a larger portion to customers they know would expect it (e.g. regulars or Iranians). Alternatively, they ask their customers to inform them if they require more rice at no additional cost.

RB2: We tell [the kitchen] to put more rice for the customers that we know.... We tell them [diners] to let us know if they want more rice and then would ask them again in the middle of their meal.

5.3.7 Theme 7 – What is on the menu?

Theme 7 looks at the different elements of the restaurant menu and their association with authenticity. First, the discussion about the names of the foods is presented, followed by restaurateurs’ perspectives on the language of their menus. Finally, the restaurateurs share their rationale behind the presence of different food items on the menus (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13 Summary of the subthemes and the key quotations related to Category 2, Theme 7, What is on the menu

Category 2, Theme 7, What is on the menu			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
7	What is on the menu?	Ghormeh Sabzi has its own personality	<p>RF: Ghormeh Sabzi is the name! It would be the same as calling me Lady, instead of [interviewee's name]. Ghormeh Sabzi is the name of the food, and we cannot take it from it has always been this and it has its own personality. I cannot take the personality away and say let's write stew with lamb and vegetables for non-Iranians to like it! I have not done this and would not do it and I think this is the right thing!</p> <p>RC: it [the food] has a name, and we should write its name. Why should I say chicken when it is Joojeh? when you look at Italian food, they say margarita!</p> <p>RF: customer try to pronounce it and on several occasions, they write it down to remember the name for next time or if they visit another restaurant because they know this food is known in all the Iranian restaurants with this name but the name should be its own name but maybe in writing it in not Farsi because here is an English speaking country and we have to use Finglish so it is easy for both Iranian and British customers but I will never change the name!</p>

	<p>RA: They (Iranian food names) are cultural tricks, to make people understand... It (using Iranian food names) would give you a different feeling.</p> <hr/> <p>RB2: Persians have been coming here for years... they know English.</p> <p>RB2: Maybe it can be interesting for new customers... honestly, I do not really know.</p> <p>RF: honestly no I have never thought about it. The Iranians, who are in the UK, have no English for sure and we have the menu in English to be respectful [to non-Iranians].</p> <p>RB2: I think if the customer is Iranian, yes, [by having a Farsi menu] they would feel it [authenticity] more.</p>
Menu language	<p>RC: if I could, I would write it in 10 other languages as well! it is visual, imagine we go to an Indian restaurant, and it is also written in Farsi. It does not mean that I cannot read Indian or English, but I would say wow it is also written in Farsi!</p> <p>RD: When I write Mast o Moosir in Farsi many may not be able to read it because it is in another language and the reason to have these [Finglish versions] is that other people apart from Iranians can pronounce it and learn the name. So, it is to show it to non-Iranians to learn it.</p> <p>RF: We have written Aashe e Reshteh in Finglish and we have explained what is in Ashe Reshteh in English, so the customer knows what they are having.</p> <hr/> <p>RA: We have lots of non-Iranian customers...and it (hummus) matches well with the starters that we serve. We have to do a favour for our customers in this international country.</p> <p>RD: it all goes back to the style of our clientele. Some customers are Arabs or Pakistani people, and they have such things on their menus for example when we serve salad Shirazi they say Tabbouleh? and we say no this is Shirazi, and they ask if we have tabbouleh. I hear this once twice three times and 10 times and we see how much our customers like this salad [Tabbouleh], and it is similar to it [Salad Shirzai], so I add it to the menu. Because the customer likes it is also to keep the customer happy yes, all our food is Iranian but we had to add a few things so the customer says "Oh they added this because of me, I like it and therefore would be back.</p> <p>RG: So, Iran does have Baklava actually, but it's a different variety.</p>
Food items	<p>RC: Hummus and halloumi are not made here (at the restaurant), a company supplies them, and we serve them. I do not allow myself to produce the product myself. It is not my expertise. If I want to spend the time, I will do it for what belongs to us.</p> <p>RC: I do not like my business to have its nose in other businesses. I do not like to add [non-Iranian items] for more profit.</p> <p>RC: because many customers do not risk saying they want Kashk e Bademjoun or Mirza Ghasemi (when they do not know it), so they get Hummus, it might bother them if it is not there, but I sometimes ask if they want me to introduce a traditional Iranian starter to them. And 9 out of 10 they would say yes, and they say wow how tasty it is why have I always had hummus as... it is tastier than hummus? This is a tool first the customer is more comfortable and by using this we are not that limited to bothering the customer, I don't know whether my reasons are right or not, but it is tasty, and we do not want to say it is only what we say!</p>

5.3.7.1 Subtheme – Ghormeh Sabzi has its own personality

Restaurateurs highlight the importance of preserving dishes' identity by keeping their original names. Interviewee RF echoes the significance of food names by humanising the food. They believe that food names are linked to the personality of the dish and changing them would be like calling a person by a different name. Restaurateur RC draws another comparison and explains that Italian food, which is already a popular ethnic food, always retains the original food names. Similarly, they believe that Iranian cuisine should also preserve the original names of its dishes.

RF: Ghormeh Sabzi is the name! It would be the same as calling me Lady, instead of [interviewee's name]. Ghormeh Sabzi is the name of the food, and we cannot take it from it has always been this and it has its own personality. I cannot take the personality away and say let's write stew with lamb and vegetables for non-Iranians to like it! I have not done this and would not do it and I think this is the right thing!

RC: it [the food] has a name, and we should write its name. Why should I say chicken when it is Joojeh? when you look at Italian food, they say margarita!

The use of the original food names in the menu is also important for maintaining consistency across restaurant menus and assists non-Iranian diners in recalling specific dishes. This practice enables customers to reorder dishes with ease and confidence, thereby contributing to an enhanced dining experience.

RF: customer try to pronounce it and on several occasions, they write it down to remember the name for next time or if they visit another restaurant because they know this food is known in all the Iranian restaurants with this name but the name should be its own name but maybe in writing it in not Farsi because here is an English speaking country and we have to use Finglish so it is easy for both Iranian and British customers but I will never change the name!

The restaurateurs seem to be aware that using authentic Iranian food names (e.g. Ghormeh Sabzi instead of Persian herb stew) can have a positive impact on customers' dining experience. And they address it as "cultural tricks" which can be an indication of designing the menu with a strategy in mind. However, the impacts that they believe the names can have, are limited to "make people understand" and giving them "a different feeling" towards their dining experience, and no particular point was mentioned about customers' perception of authenticity.

RA: They (Iranian food names) are cultural tricks, to make people understand... It (using Iranian food names) would give you a different feeling.

5.3.7.2 Subtheme - Menu language

Besides having the menu in the English language, some of the Iranian restaurants in London offer their menus in other languages such as Farsi and Arabic. The reasons for doing so are the convenience of the customers or in the cases that the Arabic menu is also available, it is to make the process of ordering the meal more efficient for both the diners and the front-of-house staff.

It is interesting that Farsi menus do not seem to be a necessity or something they have thought about for the restaurants which are established businesses with regular customers, as it is presumed that all their customers (Iranian or non-Iranian) can read and understand the English menu without any problem and such action could only be "interesting" for new customers.

RB2: Persians have been coming here for years... they know English.

RB2: Maybe it can be interesting for new customers... honestly, I do not really know.

RF: honestly no I have never thought about it. The Iranians, who are in the UK, have no English for sure and we have the menu in English to be respectful [to non-Iranians].

In the majority of the cases, the restaurateurs view the menu as something which has the basic purpose of demonstrating a list of the available foods and their prices, and very rarely, they have linked any specific strategies to their menu or would address the impacts that the menu can have on the customers' dining experience (e.g. perception of authenticity, satisfaction, etc.). And when they do, it is only about the Iranian customers who can read the Farsi language.

RB2: I think if the customer is Iranian, yes, [by having a Farsi menu] they would feel it [authenticity] more.

RC: if I could, I would write it in 10 other languages as well! it is visual, imagine we go to an Indian restaurant, and it is also written in Farsi. It does not mean that I cannot read Indian or English, but I would say wow it is also written in Farsi!

A solution some restaurants propose is to use the Finglish method of writing the menu, where Farsi words are written in English alphabets. They believe that this approach will please both Iranian and non-Iranian diners. However, by adopting this method, the visual aspect of having the menu in the Farsi language with the correct alphabet is neglected, even though the auditory elements of the food names are preserved.

RD: When I write Mast o Moosir in Farsi many may not be able to read it because it is in another language and the reason to have these [Finglish versions] is that other people apart from Iranians can pronounce it and learn the name. So, it is to show it to non-Iranians to learn it.

RF: We have written Aashe e Reshteh in Finglish and we have explained what is in Ashe Reshteh in English, so the customer knows what they are having.

5.3.7.3 Subtheme - Food items

When it comes to the food items that are available to order on the menu, service providers' focus shifts from offering authentic Iranian food items to the popularity, demand, and cost of the food.

Since Iranian food shares a noticeable number of similarities with food from countries around the Persian Gulf or Turkish food, the majority of the restaurants have decided to include non-Iranian items like Hummus or Tabbouleh (RA & RD) or a different and more familiar variety of the Iranian dish (RG).

RA: We have lots of non-Iranian customers...and it (hummus) matches well with the starters that we serve. We have to do a favour for our customers in this international country.

RD: it all goes back to the style of our clientele. Some customers are Arabs or Pakistani people, and they have such things on their menus for example when we serve salad Shirazi they say Tabbouleh? and we say no this is Shirazi, and they ask if we have tabbouleh. I hear this once twice three times and 10 times and we see how much our customers like this salad [Tabbouleh], and it is similar to it [Salad Shirzai], so I add it to the menu. Because the customer likes it is also to keep the customer happy yes, all our food is Iranian but we had to add a few things so the customer says "Oh they added this because of me, I like it and therefore would be back.

RG: So, Iran does have Baklava actually, but it's a different variety.

Some restaurateurs mention that although they serve a number of non-Iranian dishes, due to the lack of familiarity and expertise, they do not think it is acceptable to prepare those dishes in-house and would prefer to purchase them pre-made.

RC: Hummus and halloumi are not made here (at the restaurant), a company supplies them, and we serve them. I do not allow myself to produce the product myself. It is not my expertise. If I want to spend the time, I will do it for what belongs to us.

RC: I do not like my business to have its nose in other businesses. I do not like to add [non-Iranian items] for more profit.

Many customers may not be familiar with, or comfortable ordering less commonly known Iranian dishes; as a result, they may default to ordering something more familiar, such as Hummus. Therefore, restaurateurs sometimes initiate to introduce Iranian dishes to customers who may not be familiar with them. When customers are introduced to these traditional Iranian starters, they often respond positively, expressing surprise at how tasty they are compared to what they previously knew (in this case, Hummus). This positive feedback suggests that there is potential for broader acceptance of these traditional dishes if customers are given the opportunity to try them.

RC: because many customers do not risk saying they want Kashk e Bademjooon or Mirza Ghasemi (when they do not know it), so they get Hummus, it might bother them if it is not there, but I sometimes ask if they want me to introduce a traditional Iranian starter to them. And 9 out of 10 they would say yes, and they say wow how tasty it is why have I always had hummus as... it is tastier than hummus? This is a tool first the customer is more comfortable and by using this we are not that limited to bothering the customer, I don't know whether my reasons are right or not, but it is tasty, and we do not want to say it is only what we say!

Restaurants sometimes introduce certain food items to their menus to prevent food waste or balance expenses. For instance, to avoid throwing away smaller pieces of meat and vegetables, they develop new recipes incorporating those ingredients. While such practices can be beneficial in many ways, they may sometimes lead to the offering of non-authentic or even non-Iranian food.

RA: Using lots of the extra ingredients that would be wasted otherwise.

5.4 Category 3 Auditory Elements and Strategies

Category 3 covers the auditory elements and strategies and comprises two themes. The first theme looks at the spoken language within the restaurants,

followed by the second theme concerning the interviewees' choice of the music played in their restaurants, along with their experiences and opinions about having Iranian or non-Iranian music (see Table 5.14).

Table 5.14 Summary of the Category 3 - Auditory Elements, subthemes and the key quotations related to it

Category 3 – Auditory Elements and Strategies		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Spoken language	N/A
2	Music	N/A

5.4.1 Theme 1 – Spoken Language

The following section discusses the restaurateurs' opinions towards the spoken language within their restaurants. A summary of the key quotations is presented in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15 Summary of Category 3, Theme 1, Spoken language, and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 1, Spoken Language			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Language spoken	N/A	<p>RF: They [non-Iranians] have the right to understand also in regard to politeness I do not want them to be upset or have misunderstandings. I will speak English, so they fully understand.</p> <p>RD: the front of the house is 80% Iranian with a few British ones and other Farsi-speaking nationalities like Afghans and some other countries. It is not important, but we try that they are Iranian. We are at a traditional Iranian restaurant and our customer wants to speak Farsi and the staff cannot maybe a customer cannot speak English so there should be someone who can speak Farsi here is a traditional</p>

restaurant and it is correct that we are in the UK, but for many, it can be the first week that there are here [in the UK] and they cannot speak English well so staff should be able to speak Farsi.

RB2: They would tell her why you are working here if you cannot speak Farsi! Do you expect everyone to speak Farsi when you visit other restaurants as well?! When one lives here [in the UK], we have to consider that they also go to other restaurants and this [staff nationality] is not an important thing in having a good service.

There are different viewpoints regarding the spoken language within the restaurants. First, there is the belief that speaking in the Farsi language, even between staff members can be interpreted as impolite by English-speaking diners and can lead to unwanted misunderstandings. Therefore, some restaurants have the rule to speak in English only, when in sight of the diners.

RF: They [non-Iranians] have the right to understand also in regard to politeness I do not want them to be upset or have misunderstandings. I will speak English, so they fully understand.

The restaurateur (RD) shares another perspective, mentioning that since they introduce themselves as a “traditional” Iranian restaurant, it is crucial that the FOH staff are equipped with the knowledge of the Farsi language (regardless of their ethnicity). This is particularly important to consider because some customers may have just arrived in the UK and may not be proficient in English yet.

RD: the front of the house is 80% Iranian with a few British ones and other Farsi-speaking nationalities like Afghans and some other countries. It is not important, but we try that they are Iranian. We are at a traditional Iranian restaurant and our customer wants to speak Farsi and the staff cannot maybe a customer cannot speak English so there should be someone who can speak Farsi here is a traditional restaurant and it is correct that we are in the UK, but for many, it can be the first week that there are here [in the UK] and they cannot speak English well so staff should be able to speak Farsi.

Another restaurateur, shared examples of their negative experiences with Iranian diners who had been served by a non-Iranian member of the staff and were frustrated when the server was not able to communicate with them in the Farsi

language. The restaurateur does not necessarily agree with the reaction of their customers and believes that ethnic Iranian restaurants are not different from other restaurants that individuals visit. Therefore, if the provided service is impeccable, such expectations should not exist, meaning that language does not necessarily need to be a part of the dining experience.

RB2: They would tell her why you are working here if you cannot speak Farsi! Do you expect everyone to speak Farsi when you visit other restaurants as well?! When one lives here [in the UK], we have to consider that they also go to other restaurants and this [spoken language] is not an important thing in having a good service.

5.4.2 Theme 2 – Music to my ears

The second theme looks at the restaurateurs’ opinions and insights about the music played in their restaurants. A summary of the key quotations can be found in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16 Summary of Category 3, Theme 2, Music to my ears, and its key quotations

Category 3 – Theme 2, Music to my ears			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations

2	Music to my ears	N/A	<p>RF: more than 90% Iranian most of the time we play Fariborz Lachini's piano, we use Mr Shajarian's music, the dear Homayoun Shajarian and also the songs from the so-called Los Angeles singers. every kind of Iranian music.</p> <p>RF: when we played the happy birthday song, they [non-Iranian customers] asked if we could play the Farsi version and we played Andy's song. And this song is on our playlist for customers' birthdays! I mean it is not Iranians who ask for Iranian music there have been also British people who said I am in an Iranian restaurant it is my daughter's birthday please play Iranian music.</p> <p>RA: If someone asks us to play Arabic music for them, we will not ignore their request. We give them the favour and would play it for them for at least half an hour.</p> <p>RD: we have to keep everyone happy that's why we try to do whatever our customers like, but the basis of our music is traditional. Yes [we play non-Iranian music] a bit, only if they ask us.</p> <p>RG: No, actually we mix it. I'm proud of. You know the neighbouring regions I'm proud of it. Neighbouring five different countries with Iran. And we fled, we. Play any music from the region that sounds good and adds to the ambience. I know that all of Iranians, they don't like to be associated with Arab. Obviously, if you say to somebody Chinese, they are Japanese, they will be offended. And it's not about saying to an Iranian. Now let's listen to. Arab music, they're Arab. It's just about appreciating and trying to raise awareness of the region as a general and as a whole.</p> <p>RB2: It can be anything.</p> <p>RC: It does not make any difference if it [music] is Iranian or not.... It is not like that we play English music because customers are British or play Iranian music because customers are Iranian.</p> <p>RG: I think they needed to have the right energy. The right tempo. But I also needed to take you for different emotions, especially for you know Iranians that came to the restaurant...some songs triggered them.</p>
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Iranian music is the basis of what is played in many Iranian ethnic restaurants, and restaurateurs play different types of music (instrumental, traditional classical, and pop music). Interestingly, even non-Iranian diners ask for Iranian music, especially on occasions like birthdays, to have a complete Iranian dining experience.

RF: more than 90% Iranian most of the time we play Fariborz Lachini's piano, we use Mr Shajarian's music, the dear Homayoun Shajarian and also the songs from the so-called Los Angeles singers. every kind of Iranian music.

RF: when we played the happy birthday song, they [non-Iranian customers] asked if we could play the Farsi version and we played Andy's song. And this song is on our playlist for customers' birthdays! I mean it is not Iranians who ask for Iranian music there have been also

British people who said I am in an Iranian restaurant it is my daughter's birthday please play Iranian music.

Overall, playing Iranian music is one of the elements that, Iranian restaurants in London do not seem to be very strict about. The traits of the Iranian hospitality culture that the host should do anything to make the guest happy are obvious when it comes to the choice of the music that is played in the restaurants. Usually, restaurateurs who demonstrate a stronger belief in authentic Iranian hospitality are more open to accommodating the requests of their customers no matter if the requests are in line with their business or not.

RA: If someone asks us to play Arabic music for them, we will not ignore their request. We give them the favour and would play it for them for at least half an hour.

RD: we have to keep everyone happy that's why we try to do whatever our customers like, but the basis of our music is traditional. Yes [we play non-Iranian music] a bit, only if they ask us.

RG: No, actually we mix it. I'm proud of. You know the neighbouring regions I'm proud of it. Neighbouring five different countries with Iran. And we fled, we. Play any music from the region that sounds good and adds to the ambience. I know that all of Iranians, they don't like to be associated with Arab. Obviously, if you say to somebody Chinese, they are Japanese, they will be offended. And it's not about saying to an Iranian. Now let's listen to. Arab music, they're Arab. It's just about appreciating and trying to raise awareness of the region as a general and as a whole.

Restaurateurs believe that if the music is relaxing and the volume is not too high to disturb the dining experience, then there is no further evidence of service providers using music as a strategy in their business or being aware of the extended impacts that music can have on the dining experience of their guests.

RB2: It can be anything.

RC: It does not make any difference if it [music] is Iranian or not.... It is not like that we play English music because customers are British or play Iranian music because customers are Iranian.

RG: I think they needed to have the right energy. The right tempo. But I also needed to take you for different emotions, especially for you know Iranians that came to the restaurant...some songs triggered them.

5.5 Category 4 Gustatory elements and strategies (Restaurateurs)

Category 4 looks at the gustatory elements and strategies shared by Iranian ethnic restaurants and how they contribute to authenticity. A summary of the theme and subthemes related to it can be found in Table 5.17.

Table 5.17 Summary of the themes, subtheme, and the key quotations related to Category 4, Gustatory Elements and Strategies.

Category 4 – Gustatory Elements and Strategies		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Food preparation and ingredients	How do you cook the food?
		They ask, we offer

5.5.1 Theme 1 - Food preparation and ingredients

Theme 1, Food preparation and ingredients is discussed via two subthemes. First, the food preparation methods and their link with the final taste of the food, authenticity, and the significance of adhering to the original recipes and ingredients will be discussed. In the second subtheme, the reasonings behind modifications made to food recipes are explored.

Table 5.18 A summary of category 4, the Food peroration and ingredients, its subtheme, and key quotations

Category 4 - Gustatory Elements and Strategies, Theme 1, Food preparation and ingredients			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations

1	Food preparation and ingredients	How do you cook the food?	<p>RA: We cook this food that is in Iranian style.... We try to offer it in a way that it is (originally) cooked.</p> <p>RE1: Iranians travel back to Tehran, back to Iran and come back. they know how almost, they [food items] should taste they know and changing it majorly... changes if they would like it or they would consider it as a non-Iranian food. Or this is not even a good food. On the other hand, when you face non-Iranians in England which is why most of our customers at this time are non-Iranians they have more flexibility.</p> <p>RG: We always start a recipe by my parents and finding out how they make something and then we can make it and then we elevate it so. Then we look at what ingredients would change. How can we enhance method? While being operationally feasible, not logistically difficult for the chefs, but a couple others of uptake influence.</p> <p>RF: Ghormeh Sabzi is from Iran, and we cannot say that I do not like... and want to add sausage to it no I can it cannot be done and if someone wants to do this job at the Persian restaurant or even someone in French or Italian, they have to keep the best and their ESAALAT of the food.</p> <p>RF: Anyone who steps into this profession calls themselves an Iranian chef or an Italian chef? Their definition of pizza is just dough tomatoes, cheese, and a couple of sausages while it's not true it says way broader than this.</p> <p>RF: I have written on my signage Iranian restaurant. If I want to have some changes and innovations [then I] do not call my restaurant Iranian, and it is a fusion restaurant then maybe this would be okay and even maybe would like to change. But then I wrote about an Iranian restaurant with Iranian Esaalat and emphasised that it is an Iranian restaurant. I want to reserve the basis for the Esaalat of the food. I do not want to just cut the aubergine cook and mix it with the tomato sauce and tomato paste and call it Mirza Ghasemi and say it has all the ingredients of Mirza semi so dare you are no I like to keep what is the ESAALAT for the</p> <p>RD: here [in the UK], the meat they are not similar to Iran, and you can tell some specific tastes.</p> <p>RD: non-Iranians would not know it, but that Iranian customer would ask what it is why it tastes different and why you add parsley to it!</p>
		They ask, we offer	

5.5.1.1 Subtheme – How do you cook the food?

Many Iranians are very particular about their cuisine, and any significant modification to one of their dishes would be considered a red line by them. When an Iranian restaurateur was asked if they would add parsley to their Koobideh kabab (minced lamb skewer), an interesting moment ensued. The interviewee was shocked and reminded the researcher that such practices are unacceptable. Restaurateurs believe that such practices (e.g. adding parsley to Koobideh Kabab) would negatively affect the perception of authenticity and will be considered unacceptable and even an indication of 'bad food' for Iranian diners. However, non-Iranian diners may not notice the change due to their limited familiarity with Iranian cuisine.

RA: We cook this food that is in Iranian style.... We try to offer it in a way that it is (originally) cooked.

RF: Ghormeh Sabzi is from Iran, and we cannot say that I do not like beans and want to add sausage to it no I can it cannot be done and if someone wants to do this job at the Persian restaurant or even someone in French or Italian, they have to keep the best and their ESAALAT of the food.

RE1: Iranians travel back to Tehran, back to Iran and come back. they know how almost, the [food items] should taste they know and changing it majorly... changes if they would like it or they would consider it as a non-Iranian food. Or this is not even a good food. On the other hand, when you face non-Iranians in England which is why most of our customers at this time are non-Iranians they have more flexibility.

RD: non-Iranians would not know it, but that Iranian customer would ask what it is why it tastes different and why you add parsley to it!

For one of the restaurateurs, the first place to refer for having an authentic recipe is their parents. However, they do not limit themselves to the exact original recipe and would consider modifying it to match the requirements of a commercial kitchen in terms of feasibility and quality.

RG: We always start a recipe by my parents and finding out how they make something and then we can make it and then we elevate it so. Then we look at what ingredients would change. How can we enhance method? While being operationally feasible, not logistically difficult for the chefs, but a couple others of uptake influence.

However, not all restaurateurs agree with the idea of modifying the dishes. For instance, interviewee RF insists that if the modified dishes are being served in a restaurant, then it should be clear on the signage and how the restaurant introduces itself, otherwise, the *Esaalat* (اصالت) of the dish is compromised.

Another important factor to note is that using a specific list of ingredients for a dish cannot guarantee the authenticity of it and the cooking methods are equally important. An example of a popular dish (Mirza Ghasemi) which is often served in London's Iranian restaurants is given by interviewee RF, who was born and raised in the specific region that the dish originates from.

RF: I have written on my signage Iranian restaurant. If I want to have some changes and innovations [then I] do not call my restaurant Iranian, and it is a fusion restaurant then maybe this would be okay and even maybe would like to change. But then I wrote about an Iranian restaurant with Iranian *Esaalat* and emphasised that it is an Iranian restaurant. I want to reserve the basis for the *Esaalat* of the food. I do not want to just cut the aubergine cook and mix it with the tomato sauce and tomato paste and call it Mirza Ghasemi and say it has all the ingredients of Mirza Ghasemi so there you are not like to keep what is the *Esaalat* for the food.

It is indisputable that the quality and variety of raw ingredients have an inevitable impact on the final dish's taste. This holds true, particularly in the UK, where the availability and quality of certain products, such as meat and dairy, are considerably different from those in Iran.

RD: here [in the UK], the meat they are not similar to Iran, and you can tell some specific tastes.

5.5.1.2 Subtheme – They ask, we offer

While the restaurateurs usually emphasise cooking the food in an Iranian style (see page 109), sometimes variations of classic dishes are found on the menus of the restaurants. One justification for serving these dishes in restaurants involves adjusting food recipes by adding or omitting specific ingredients to cater to the tastes of customers in the UK. For example, one interviewee noted that while Iranians typically do not include red pepper in their preparation of Gheymeh stew at home, they have chosen to incorporate it into the restaurant recipe due to its popularity (RB2). Another motivation for such adaptations is to accommodate diverse lifestyles and dietary preferences, such as vegetarianism or veganism, by substituting meat with suitable alternatives.

RB2: But it is very popular here for its flavour.

RC: No, there is no such thing (pepper in Bademjoon stew). But let's not forget that we are not in Iran, and we change some things in response to the taste of our customers... And for some food as the word is moving towards vegetarianism and veganism, we have to work on it more for example for meat-free Bademjoon or Ghormeh Sabzi if we take the meat out it would be only herbs dried lime and some beans and nothing else, so there is nothing wrong with adding a few potatoes to it... Maybe the taste is not original, but we have a few options that are made in this way considering the market.

5.6 Category 5 Olfactory elements and strategies

The themes related to Category 5 – olfactory elements and strategies - can be found in Table 5.19. Olfactory elements and strategies are discussed in the two themes of food smell and infused scent.

Table 5.19 Summary of the themes, subtheme and Key quotations related to category 5, Olfactory Elements and Categories.

No	Category 5 – Olfactory Elements and Strategies	
	Theme	Subtheme
1	Food Aroma	N/A
2	Infused scent	N/A

5.6.1 Theme 1- Food aroma

The summary of category 5, Theme 1, Food aroma and the key quotations related to it is presented in Table 5.20.

Table 5.20 A summary of Category 5, Theme 1, Food Aroma, and its key quotations

No	Category 5, Theme 1, Food Aroma		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
1	Food Aroma	N/A	RB1: It is too bad that there is a food smell in the restaurant! The worst thing is that the customers visit, and their clothes smell like food... I do not like it (laughs).

While smelling freshly baked bread or char-grilled kabab might seem tempting to some, not all ethnic Iranian restaurants would agree. To some with more traditional views towards dining out, being able to smell any traces of the food in the restaurant is a negative element and would be an indication of the restaurant not being professional or not caring enough about their customers.

RB1: It is too bad that there is a food smell in the restaurant! ... The worst thing is that the customers visit, and their clothes smell like food... I do not like it (laughs).

5.6.2 Theme 2 - Infused scent

The summary of category 5, Theme 2, Infused scent, and the key quotations related to it is presented in Table 5.21.

Table 5.21 A summary of Category 5, theme 2, Infused scent and its key quotations

No	Category 5, Olfactory Elements and Strategies, Theme 2, Infused Scent		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
2	Infused scent	N/A	RB1: They [non-Iranians] do not know what it is!"
			RB1: But I am not a superstitious person...
			RC: No, sometimes it bothers me the smell of Oud for example, maybe Esfand is the same for others that Oud is for me.
			RF: no, we do not like it at all. You should always be the smell of the fresh food which is being served at the restaurant and nothing else.

In the current research, infused scent refers to any kind of natural or artificial scent that can be added to the air by spraying, boiling, burning or other techniques. Some of the most famous Iranian scents are rose water (Golab), saffron (Zaferan), cardamom (Hel) and Wild rue (Espand).

Some Iranian restaurateurs, either view burning Espand as solely a superstitious belief or a scent that interferes with the main element of the restaurant (food) and strongly reject the idea of using it to enhance the sense of 'Iranianness' in their restaurants.

RA: but I am not a superstitious person!

RF: no, we do not like it at all. You should always be the smell of the fresh food which is being served at the restaurant and nothing else.

It is believed by some restaurateurs that since many diners are not familiar with exotic things like Espand, there is no point in using it in a restaurant. This assumption takes Iranian diners for granted, as the term "diner" is only used to refer to non-Iranians.

RB2: They [non-Iranian diners] do not know what it is.

The comparison between Espand and other culturally identifiable scents, such as Oud, has raised concerns among those restaurateurs who find the latter disagreeable. Therefore, there is a concern that Espand might likewise be perceived as unpleasant by non-Iranians.

RC: No, sometimes it bothers me the smell of Oud for example, maybe Espand is the same for others that Oud is for me.

5.7 Category 6 Iranian Hospitality Culture

A summary of the themes, and subthemes related to category 6 – Iranian hospitality culture, can be found in Table 5.22.

Table 5.22 Summary of themes and subthemes related category 6, Iranian Hospitality Culture

Category 6, Iranian Hospitality Culture		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Ehteram (respect), Ahammiat (Care) and Authenticity	N/A
2	Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)	The guest is God's beloved
		Offering free items

5.7.1 Theme 1 – Ehteram (respect), Ahammiat (care) and Authenticity

Category 6, theme 1, discusses the significance of ultimate respect and care for diners in Iranian ethnic restaurants. A summary of the key quotations is presented in Table 5.23.

Table 5.23 Summary of category 6, Theme 1, Ehteram (respect), Ahammiat (care) and Authenticity

Category 6, Theme 1, Ehteram (respect), Ahammiat (Care) and Authenticity			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
1	Ehteram (respect), Ahammiat (Care) and authenticity	N/A	<p>RB2: They tell us that we feel like entering a home in Iran and not a restaurant..... I think this [hospitality] would emphasize this [the authenticity] more.</p> <p>RF: the first thing that attracts the customers and not only in the restaurant is the welcome. It can be at your home in a restaurant in a shop in a hospital or anywhere after that it is the environment that you create for the customer.</p> <p>RA: We give our customers as much attention as we can, [we tell our guests] Yes sir, we are at your service.</p>

When you visit an Iranian household, you are usually greeted with a warm welcome and offered an endless variety of food and drinks. Similarly, when you step into an Iranian restaurant, even if it is thousands of miles away from Iran, one can expect the same level of hospitality (RB2). Iranian restaurateurs believe that hospitality and welcome are the initial factors that can attract customers to any service provider. Therefore, they usually welcome diners with the utmost respect (Ehteram – احترام) and would care (Ahammiat – اهمیت) for their comfort as much as possible.

RB2: They tell us that we feel like entering a home in Iran and not a restaurant..... I think this [hospitality] would emphasise this [the authenticity] more.

RF: the first thing that attracts the customers and not only in the restaurant is the welcome. It can be at your home in a restaurant in a shop in a hospital or anywhere after that it is the environment that you create for the customer.

RA: We give our customers as much attention as we can, [we tell our guests] Yes sir, we are at your service.

5.7.2 Theme 2 – Mehman Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)

A summary of category 6, theme 2, its subthemes and the relevant key quotations is presented in Table 5.24.

Table 5.24 A summary of Category 6, Theme 2, Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)

No	Category 6, Theme 2, Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key quotations
2	Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)	The guest is God's beloved	RA: They are not customer; they are our guest
		It is on the house	RA: When the customers finished their food would give it to them as a gift. We mostly try to offer them (non-Iranians) something on the house, so the customer sees our culture.

5.7.2.1 Subtheme – The guest is God's beloved

Some restaurant owners believe that their customers should be treated as guests with utmost care and respect (see 5.7.1). In Iran, hospitality is highly valued, and guests are often referred to as 'God's Beloved' (حبيب خدا) regardless of whether they are visiting a commercial setting or an Iranian household (see 2.5). This level of hospitality can be compared to the Havamal poem in the Poetic Edda¹¹, which emphasizes the importance of treating all strangers with great hospitality as they may be Odin in disguise.

RA: They are not customer; they are our guest

5.7.2.2 Subtheme – It is on the house

Iranian hospitality often involves offering complimentary items to customers, not only in restaurants but also in other commercial settings like local grocery shops and confectioneries. This practice is seen by restaurateurs as an opportunity to introduce Iranian culture to non-Iranian guests and enhance their dining experience.

RA: When the customers finished their food would give it to them as a gift. We mostly try to offer them (non-Iranians) something on the house, so the customer sees our culture.

¹¹ The ancient body of Icelandic literature

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter commences by presenting the demographic data of the restaurateurs who were interviewed. Subsequently, the findings were categorised into several categories, themes, and subthemes and were thematically analysed. Six categories were identified. The first category examines the findings regarding authenticity, presenting their awareness, opinions, and perceptions of the concept.

Then a detailed examination of different sensory strategies is presented.

First, visual elements and strategies such as restaurants' exterior design, interior design, the different factors associated with the staff such as their ethnicity and uniforms and were presented. This was followed by auditory elements of spoken language and music. In the next category, food preparation methods and their link with food taste were investigated. Olfactory elements including food smell and infused scents were discussed and finally, the significance of Iranian hospitality on authenticity was examined.

CHAPTER 6 Diners, Authenticity, and Sensory Elements

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the population characteristics of the interviewed diners, followed by an overview and discussion of the categories, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the interviews (Methodology Chapter, Section 4.5.3). The main objectives of these interviews were to explore and analyse the perception of diners towards authenticity and determine its association with sensory elements.

A summary of the identified categories is presented below in Table 6.1 .

Table 6.1 A summary of the identified categories from the diners' interviews

No	Category
1	Authenticity (Diners)
2	Iranian hospitality and dining culture (Diners)
3	Visual Elements and Strategies
4	Auditory Elements and Strategies
5	Olfactory Elements and Strategies
6	Gustatory Elements and Strategies

The summary of the identified themes and subthemes is presented at the beginning of each category. Moreover, for ease of reference, the tables of key quotations related to each theme and subtheme are presented at the beginning of the discussion of each theme.

6.2 Population Characteristics (Diners)

Table 6.2 demonstrates the characteristics and demographics of the interviewed diners (n= 20), including their code, ethnicity, years living in the UK, age range and gender.

Table 6.2 Characteristics and demographics of the interviewed diners

Code	Ethnicity	Years living in the UK	Age	Gender	Code	Ethnicity	Years living in the UK	Age	Gender
I1	Iranian	1	18	M	NI1	Palestinian	1	41	F
I2	Iranian	10	39	F	NI2	Portuguese	14	37	M
I3	Iranian	17	35	M	NI3	Latvian	9	34	M
I4	Iranian	2	35	M	NI4	British	32	32	M
I5	Iranian	1	41	F	NI5	Polish	24	67	F
I6	Iranian	Not given	44	F	NI6	Bulgarian	16	38	F
I7	Iranian	2	32	F	NI7	British	22	22	F
I8	Iranian	1	37	M	NI8	Japanese	4	62	F
I9	Iranian	19	47	M	NI9	American	2	26	F
I10	Iranian	1	29	F	NI10	Israeli	N/G	35	M

6.3 Category 1 Authenticity (Diners)

A summary of the themes and subthemes, related to Category 1 – Authenticity can be found in Table 6.3 . The first theme looks at the interviewees' definitions and perception of authenticity covering four further subthemes, and then the interchangeability of the terms 'traditional' and 'authentic' is investigated. Finally, the ideas and opinions of the interviewees about the significance of food and its direct link with their perception of authenticity are discussed in theme 3.

Table 6.3 Summary of Category 1, Authenticity (Diners), its themes and subthemes.

Category 1, Authenticity (Diners)		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Definition and perception of Authenticity	What does authenticity mean?
		Objectivity, Subjectivity and Authenticity
		Previous experience, perception, and authenticity
		Pseudo-Iranian, staged, and touristic
		It feels like home
2	Traditional vs Authentic	N/A
3	Food has the final say (or not)	N/A

6.3.1 Theme 1 – Definition and Perception of Authenticity

This section will look into the five subthemes of Theme 1, Definition and perception of authenticity. The first subtheme presents an analysis and discussion regarding the definition of authenticity. Subsequently, diners' objective and subjective perspectives in relation to authenticity will be explored. The third subtheme will examine how previous experiences can influence an individual's perception of authenticity. Subtheme four will investigate instances where offerings could be perceived as staged rather than authentic. Lastly, the importance of "homeness" and its association with authenticity will be discussed. A summary of the key quotations related to each subtheme is presented at the beginning of each section.

6.3.1.1 Subtheme - What does authenticity mean?

Table 6.4 presents a summary of subtheme 1, the definition and perception of authenticity and its key quotations related to Category 1, Theme 1.

Table 6.4 A summary of the key quotations related to Category 1, Theme 1, Subtheme 1, What does authenticity mean?

Category 1, Theme 1, Subtheme 1 What does authenticity mean?		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	What does authenticity mean?	<p>I5: My definition it is something pure.</p> <p>NI5: something real</p> <p>NI9: I feel like it is cliched but true to itself, like true to what it is or that is not changed.</p> <p>NI7: Not corrupted by anything else.</p> <p>I9: let me say that Asb e Aseel [pure-bred horse], it means that you know. Is originating [original] and it is not contaminated with anything else. It is just pure and original. Yeah, yeah perhaps we can use the same word for food as [well]</p> <p>NI1: you feel more confident that it is original.</p> <p>NI6: something that. Makes you special</p> <p>I1: That wouldn't make me feel good. Definitely feel bad [laughs]</p> <p>NI6: something that makes you special</p> <p>NI1: for me, authenticity is about to be true about reflecting your original culture and food.</p> <p>I1: How close the food is to the one that is served in the country.</p>

Diners, much like restaurateurs, do not seem to have a clear definition of what authenticity means. When asked about their definition of 'authenticity', interviewees often pause or respond with comments like "it's difficult to say" or "that's an interesting question." The information provided is usually short sentences without further elaboration and is very similar to the dictionary definition of the word. The most commonly used terms to describe authenticity are "pure," "real," "true to self," and "original."

I5: My definition it is something pure.

NI5: something real

NI9: I feel like it is cliched but true to itself, like true to what it is or that is not changed.

When authentic is defined as something that has not undergone change or modification, any kind of alteration can be interpreted as corruption of originality. An interesting explanation of this was provided by one of the interviewees, talking about 'pure-bred horses', using the term Aseel - اصيل and how the same word and concept can be applied to food.

NI7: Not corrupted by anything else.

I9: let me say that Asb e Aseel [pure-bred horse], it means that you know. Is originating [original] and it is not contaminated with anything else. It is just pure and original. Yeah, yeah, perhaps we can use the same word for food as [well]

On numerous occasions, the interviewees used the verb "*feel*" to talk about different elements and authenticity. When "*feel*" is followed by adjectives such as "*good*", "*confident*" or "*special*", they are usually talking about the elements being perceived as authentic and when the verb is followed by negative adjectives such as "*bad*", they are usually expressing the fact that authenticity has not been communicated to them effectively.

NI1: you feel more confident that it is original.

NI6: Something that makes you special

I1: That wouldn't make me feel good. Definitely feel bad [laughs]

Diners' perceptions of authenticity, regardless of their ethnicity and previous experience, are quite similar. All share the thought that authenticity is linked with the original culture and, interestingly, soon after mentioning *culture* or *civilisation*, they mention *food* and how the food served should be similar to what is served in the country of origin. Detailed information regarding different aspects of food and their links with authenticity will be presented later in sections 6.3.3.

NI1: For me, authenticity is about to be truth about reflecting your original culture and food.

I1: How close the food is to the one that is served in the country.

6.3.1.2 Subtheme – Objectivity, subjectivity, and authenticity

A summary of the second subtheme and key quotations related to category 1, theme 1, is presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 A summary of the key quotations related to category 1, Theme 1, Subtheme 2, Objectivity, Subjectivity and Authenticity

Category1, Theme 1, Subtheme 2 Objectivity, Subjectivity and Authenticity		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	Objectivity, Subjectivity and Authenticity	<p>NI9: for a cat to be authentic. You know it. It has you know four legs. It wags... it goes. Meow. You know, like to me like that's authentic.</p> <p>NI4: The most possibly bland, horrible stereotypes...you do not really know. I think it is just a lot of that. It is just what had like, sort of indoctrinated into just from media like, you know, media or pictures. And I think true authenticity is a bit beyond that.</p> <p>I9: It is just my gut feeling and impression</p> <p>NI5: That word has different meanings to different people.</p> <p>NI4: That it that does not necessarily mean people are gonna go in and perceive it that way because it is a lot of it is based on their knowledge.</p> <p>NI2: I want to experience the whole package.</p> <p>NI4: [in] a Persian household, the experience of eating and being in that situation could would be authentically Persian, but. You know, if they made me fish and chips. Mm-hmm... So that then the experience would be authentic, but the food wouldn't be...but yeah, in a restaurant... it needs to be everything it needs to represent, you know? The food needs to be authentic, but also the experience of that, and that's obviously the more complicated one.</p>

When discussing predefined objects and concepts like living species or colours, authenticity is evaluated objectively, often measured by adhering to a pre-established and known set of factors (Wang, 1999). Below, the example of a cat is given by interviewee NI9, mentioning some of the known and objective criteria that would make a cat, a cat.

NI9: for a cat to be authentic. You know it. It has you know four legs. It wags.... it goes Meow. You know, like to me like that's authentic.

Nonetheless, in dining settings with the ultimate goal being to have or deliver an experience, authenticity is more of an unconscious perception (subjective) rather than a predefined definition (objective) to which one is exposed. And this makes it a complex concept, which, as interviewee NI4 suggests is “beyond” the clichés and stereotypical elements usually communicated via media.

NI4: The most possibly bland, horrible stereotypes...you do not really know. I think it is just a lot of that. It is just what had like, sort of indoctrinated into just from media like, you know, media or pictures. And I think true authenticity is a bit beyond that.

Diners base their perception of authenticity on their understanding, “gut feeling and impression” (I9), which are unique to each person (NI5). Therefore, authenticity cannot be viewed as a standardised matter that follows set rules.

I9: It is just my gut feeling and impression.

NI5: That word has different meanings to different people.

Since -constructive-authenticity is a subjective concept, it is important to note that a single element can be perceived differently by different individuals and the perception depends on their knowledge and experience (Wang, 1999). The role of previous experience and knowledge in the perception of authenticity will be discussed on page 125 (section 6.3.1.3).

NI4: That it that does not necessarily mean people are gonna go in and perceive it that way because it is a lot of it is based on their knowledge.

Instead, authenticity can be viewed as a package of multiple elements and criteria that need to accompany each other in order to deliver the true experience (NI2). For instance, solely being in an Iranian household - the ultimate place to have an authentic Iranian experience - cannot necessarily convey the message of

authenticity since the perception and cycle of authenticity can be negatively affected if different elements of the experience do not match each other (NI4).

NI2: I want to experience the whole package.

NI4: [in] a Persian household, the experience of eating and being in that situation would be authentically Persian, but. You know, if they made me fish and chips. Mm-hmm... So that then the experience would be authentic, but the food wouldn't be...but yeah, in a restaurant...it needs to be everything it needs to represent, you know? The food needs to be authentic, but also the experience of that, and that's obviously the more complicated one.

6.3.1.3 Subtheme – Previous experience, Perception, and Authenticity

Table 6.6 presents a summary of subtheme 3, Previous experience, perception, and authenticity and its key quotations related to Category 1, Theme 1.

Table 6.6 A summary of the key quotations related to category 1, theme 1, subtheme 3, Previous experience, perception, and authenticity

Category1, Theme 1, Subtheme 3 Previous experience, perception, and authenticity		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
		<p>I9: I do not have a clear definition</p> <p>NI4: It is always gonna be based on the knowledge base of the people going</p> <p>NI3: That newness suggests that it is authentic.</p> <p>NI7: ...unfamiliar, because like I haven't experienced it before would make me feel like it is authentic. Like I haven't had it anywhere else.</p> <p>NI1: when I see this is not from my past experience, so I believe that they are their original food.</p>
3	Previous experience, perception, and authenticity	<p>NI3: I guess, authenticity also is. Could be linked to... someone who's not in that ethnicity. You might be comparing it to how different it tastes. Perhaps the word different maybe is interesting, because if I am tasting for instance rice and I've eaten rice at Chinese or somewhere else.</p> <p>NI6: because. I've been to Lebanese; I have been to. Other these parts of the world restaurants, let's say. It was something like you can have in most of them.</p> <p>NI3: Maybe they are giving me authentic dish. I just do not know. How to compare it compare?</p> <p>NI7: you would need like a standard to measure against...</p> <p>NI4: I am not sure I am in a position to know what's authentic, particularly if it was my first time.</p> <p>NI5: I wouldn't on my own. I would simply judge whether I liked it or not.</p>

I3: If you [talk to] the Japanese peoples about the sushi. They know how [it should taste], but if I am going to [have] sushi or [to] Japanese restaurants, I do not know actually what the sushi has to be. I want to eat sushi. I do not know. So just with delicious and tasty.

NI1: I will compare later when I try another Persian restaurant if they have the same dish if they are using the same ingredients, so it is the original dish.

NI10: I grew up umm in a neighbourhood where my neighbour was Jewish of Persian descent, so they used to host us, and we used to have a lot of Persian food. I've seen it before and so that therefore seeing it again would be some sort of a marker

NI10: I think like if I am, if I ever visited Iran and then come back to London and eat in a restaurant having eaten in Iran, then I would be able to be a better judge of, like, what's authentic, what is not.

NI4: I wanted an authentic experience of the culture. I would almost say drop me in the city, drop me in the city in that place and just let me walk around and experience and be confused and not understand everything, but see how people actually interact.

NI3: Very authentic would be if I would go to Persia and If I go to Iran, sorry and taste it there and then I am able to compare it to meals in London.

I7: I am trying to compare with the restaurant that are already back home in Iran and say yeah, what to say something like that in here.

I9: So, I would guess a lot depends whether that. An experience I am having matches what I've had back home in Iran. My mom is a great cook, so she's going to be the reference point obviously for me.

I2: because we have the experience of the authentic Persian food, we cannot find any restaurant here like the authentic one.

I6: I haven't seen [an authentic Iranian restaurant] here in the UK or also in Germany, so the one I have in my mind is was a restaurant in Yazd And that for me ...would be an authentic restaurant.

As discussed earlier, the diners' definition of authenticity usually covers the generic and basic terms, however it is important to address the difference between the terms; 'definition' and 'perception'. While 'definition' refers to the explanation and meaning of a word, 'perception' addresses "an idea, a belief or an image" of something which is based on one's understandings and viewpoint (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). Meaning that while *definition* is mainly stagnant, *perception* is more of a fluid concept that can be affected by one's lived experiences.

I9: I do not have a clear definition.

NI4: It is always gonna be based on the knowledge base of the people going.

Therefore, in the case of Iranian ethnic restaurants, diners' perception of authenticity is directly linked to variables such as their ethnicity, previous experience of visiting Iranian restaurants, and/or their exposure to the Iranian culture. So, when reference points are not available, the judging criteria for non-Iranian diners with little-to-no familiarity and experience would be the perceived *uniqueness* and *newness* of the offerings.

NI3: That newness suggests that it is authentic.

NI7: ... unfamiliar, because like I haven't experienced it before would make me feel like it is authentic. Like I haven't had it anywhere else.

And another round of judgement also takes place when non-Iranian diners use their previous experiences of dining in other ethnic restaurants (e.g. Italian, Chinese, Mexican, etc.) as the marker for comparison. And where there are no shared criteria between the two experiences, it can be perceived that the restaurant is authentic (NI1). For instance, NI3 provided the example of 'rice' and that they will compare what is offered in an Iranian restaurant to the version of 'rice' which they had tasted at a Chinese restaurant and if the rice -being the same ingredient- tastes different, it can be a sign that it is authentic.

NI1: when I see this is not from my past experience, so I believe that they are their original food.

NI3: I guess, authenticity also is...could be linked to someone who's not in that ethnicity. You might be comparing it to how different it tastes. Perhaps the word different maybe is interesting, because if I am tasting for instance rice and I've eaten rice at Chinese or somewhere else...

However, these comparisons cannot always provide the diners with clarity, and can even impact their perception of authenticity negatively. As in some instances

the shared ingredients, techniques, cultures, etc. between the neighbouring countries and areas can potentially devalue the uniqueness.

NI6: Because I've been to Lebanese, I have been to other these parts of the world restaurants, let's say. It was something like you can have in most of them.

That said, some of the non-Iranian diners believe that due to the absence of previous experience, knowledge (NI3) and “a standard to measure against” (NI7), first-timers cannot judge the authenticity of the food on offer (NI4). Therefore, the one thing that they can comment on is whether they personally like what is offered or not (NI5).

NI3: Maybe they are giving me authentic dish. I just do not know how to compare it.

NI7: you would need like a standard to measure against...

NI4: I am not sure I am in a position to know what's authentic, particularly if it was my first time.

NI5: I wouldn't on my own. I would simply judge whether I liked it or not.

This can be discussed further by looking at a case provided by one of the Iranian diners regarding familiarity, knowledge the perception of authenticity. Giving the example of sushi as a Japanese dish, the interviewee elaborated on the point that only individuals from the referent ethnicity would truly “know” about the authentic version and those -like him- who are not members of that ethnicity and/or “do not know” about the authentic dish, would solely judge their experience based on the taste.

I3: If you [talk to] the Japanese peoples about the sushi. They know how [it should taste], but if I am going to [have] sushi or [to] Japanese restaurants, I do not know actually what the sushi has to be. I want to eat sushi. I do not know, so just with delicious and tasty

When the diners have had previous experience of dining in an Iranian restaurant and/or were exposed to the hospitality culture, their judging criteria are then based on their ethnicity (Iranian vs non-Iranian). For non-Iranians, the repeated occurrence of the same elements through their different dining experiences -at restaurants or in Iranian households-, can be an indicator of authenticity. For instance, interviewee NI1 believes that if they see the same ingredients in a specific dish -that they were not originally familiar with- in a restaurant after having the same thing in their previous experiences, it can mean that they are being offered the original dish.

NI1: I will compare later when I try another Persian restaurant if they have the same dish if they are using the same ingredients, so it is the original dish.

NI10: I grew up umm in a neighbourhood where my neighbour was Jewish of Persian descent, so they used to host us and we used to have a lot of Persian food. I've seen it before and so that therefore seeing it again would be some sort of a marker.

Non-Iranians believe that the ultimate and ideal way for them to truly judge the authenticity of what is offered outside of Iran (in this case London, UK), is to visit the country and have a first-hand experience of the food and the hospitality culture there. In this scenario, having experienced the original version, they would be equipped with reliable markers to compare their future experiences against.

NI10: I think like if I am, if I ever visited Iran and then come back to London and eat in a restaurant having eaten in Iran, then I would be able to be a better judge of, like, what's authentic, what is not.

NI4: I wanted an authentic experience of the culture. I would almost say drop me in the city, drop me in the city in that place and just let me walk around and experience and be confused and not understand everything, but see how people actually interact.

NI3: Very authentic would be if I would go to Persia and. If I go to Iran, sorry and taste it there and then I am able to compare it to meals in London.

When it comes to Iranian diners, their point of comparison is naturally what they have experienced in Iran (I7). Meaning that their perception is not limited to what is available in restaurants but is significantly related to their upbringings and private lives. Therefore, for many individuals, homemade food specifically those being made by close relatives like their mothers, acts as the “reference point” to judge the authenticity of the restaurant offerings.

I7: I am trying to compare with the restaurant that are already back home in Iran and say yeah, what to say something like that in here.

I9: So, I would guess a lot depends whether that experience I am having matches what I've had back home in Iran. My mom is a great cook, so she's going to be the reference point obviously for me.

While Iranian diners' profound knowledge base can provide them with the confidence to tell the authentic from the unauthentic, it is indeed a double-edged sword, turning them into tough judges with higher expectations and more challenging standards. Meaning in some cases Iranian diners would not accept anything outside of Iran as authentic.

I2: because we have the experience of the authentic Persian food, we cannot find any restaurant here like the authentic one.

I6: I haven't seen [an authentic Iranian restaurant] here in the UK or also in Germany, so the one I have in my mind it was a restaurant in Yazd And that for me ...would be an authentic restaurant.

6.3.1.4 Subtheme - Pseudo-Iranian, staged, and touristic

A summary of subtheme 4 and key quotations related to Category 1, Theme 1 are presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 A summary of the key quotations related to category 1, Theme 1, Subtheme 4, Pseudo-Iranian, staged, and touristic

Category1, Theme 1, Subtheme 4, Pseudo-Iranian, staged, and touristic		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
4	Pseudo-Iranian, staged, and touristic	<p>I3: it [is a] simulated Iranian restaurant. It is not actually like that.</p> <p>NI5:[when certain elements are there then] it is not a pseudo-Iranian, it is a real Iranian</p> <p>I3: in Iran, when you went to the restaurant, they actually design everything like Iranian cultures, and they use it like some traditional things. Which is we cannot find in here in some [restaurants], but some of the restaurant they trying to actually copy paste in here, but it is not like that</p> <p>NI10: I wanna be in on something, that the common tourists wouldn't. So, for so if I go to a place and it is incredibly touristic, then I wouldn't really feel like it is authentic.</p>

Restaurateurs' attempts to create an authentic Iranian atmosphere may not always be received as intended by diners. A "copy-paste" approach in replication of the elements that are present in the restaurant back in Iran can negatively influence the perception of authenticity, resulting in the offerings being perceived as staged, "simulated", and "pseudo-Iranian".

I3: in Iran, when you went to the restaurant, they actually design everything like Iranian cultures, and they use it like some traditional things. Which is we cannot find in here in some [restaurants], but some of the restaurant they trying to actually copy paste in here, but it's not like that.

I3: it [is a] simulated Iranian restaurant. It's not actually like that.

NI5: [when certain elements are there then] it's not a pseudo-Iranian, it's a real Iranian...

According to NI10, the presence of tourists. Can be considered another indicator of a non-authentic restaurant. This implies that eateries that draw a predominantly tourist crowd may not necessarily provide an authentic culinary experience and

may instead cater to the tastes and preferences of a broader, more generic audience.

NI10: I wanna be in on something that the common tourists wouldn't. So, for so if I go to a place and it is incredibly touristic, then I wouldn't really feel like it is authentic.

6.3.1.5 Subtheme - It feels like home (or someone else's)

A summary of subtheme 5 and key quotations related to Category 1, Theme 1 are presented in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8 A summary of the key quotations related to category 1, Theme 1, Subtheme5, It feels like home (or someone else's)

Category1, Theme 1, Subtheme 5, It feels like home (or someone else's)		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
5	It feels like home (or someone else's)	<p>I7: I would say if I feel like I am back in home, I will feel that that place is authentic and it gives me vibes of my own homeland, my own country, my own food.... there are plenty of elements that could fill me could convey that message for me, but to just summarise in a word, just feeling back home.</p> <p>I8: the first priority would be the feeling that you when I go to Iranian restaurant, I expect to feel that I am in my country.</p> <p>NI3: Authenticity. I think the very good synonym word that comes in mind is home when you home our home. It is like when you have that sensation.... in case of Persian, it will be someone else's home. But you feel they are sharing this sense of home homeless perhaps.</p> <p>NI4: To get a sense of like home</p> <p>I10: when you are walking inside the restaurant, you are getting away from London and it is something like different from other restaurant or other places and you somehow feel like home.</p> <p>NI9: Feel like I am stepping into a different world. Almost like I should be able to go from. I do not know. We're in British culture and maybe a Persian restaurant. I should be able to step in and feel like I am not even. In England.</p>

As discussed earlier, one of the ways that diners judge authenticity is based on the closeness of the offerings to the referent country (see section 6.3.1.3). In the case of Iranian ethnic restaurants, for Iranians, the referent country is their home country, and dining in an authentic Iranian restaurant brings them a sense of attachment and closeness to "home".

I7: I would say if I feel like I am back in home, I will feel that that place is authentic and it gives me vibes of my own homeland, my own country, my own food.... there are plenty of elements that could fill me could convey that message for me, but to just summarize in a word, just feeling back home,

I8: the first priority would be the feeling that you when I go to Iranian restaurant, I expect to feel that I am in my country.

This does not mean that 'home' necessarily needs to be one's own and the feeling of being welcomed in another person's home -or this case an ethnic restaurant that conveys the 'homeness (NI4)- can also be perceived in a similar way (NI3).

NI3: Authenticity. I think the very good synonym word that comes in mind is home when you home our home. It is like when you have that sensation.... in case of Persian, it will be someone else's home. But you feel they are sharing this sense of home... homeness perhaps.

NI4: To get a sense of like home.

Upon entering an Iranian ethnic restaurant, regardless of their ethnicity, diners expect that the reality of being in the UK is left behind and a different world (Iran) is entered. This transformation can be an indicator of a truly authentic dining experience.

I10: when you are walking inside the restaurant, you are getting away from London and it is something Like different from other restaurants or other places and you somehow feel like home.

NI9: Feel like I am stepping into a different world. Almost like I should be able to go from, I do not know... We're in British culture and maybe a Persian restaurant. I should be able to step in and feel like I am not even in England.

6.3.2 Theme 2 – Traditional vs Authentic

The summary of the key quotations related to the theme; Traditional vs Authentic is presented in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 A summary of Category 1, Theme 2 - Traditional vs Authentic and key quotations

No	Category 1, Authenticity (Diners)		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	Traditional vs Authentic	N/A	<p>I1: how close it is to what is traditional.</p> <p>NI1: ...you feel that you are in a really traditional place.</p> <p>NI2: I think we can do the same traditionally in authentic can be under the same umbrella</p> <p>NI3: I realise authenticity for me also. Equals to old. Yeah, I forgot to mention. I think that's quite important. Old. Well, it is a big word. But something more based and rooted in traditions.</p> <p>NI9: the differences are just so small, does it matter? Does the wording matter to someone? Like if someone sees traditional over authentic? You know next to the restaurant name or something? I do not know if that would change my perception or not</p> <p>I7: Traditional kind of feels like something old, but authentic is something that is close to its origin could say, so they won't be the same for me.</p> <p>I9: They are sort of interlocked.</p> <p>NI4: I think something can be authentic without being traditional because cultures change, things change, times change....authenticity does not have to be traditional, the traditional thing, I would say is likely authentic so.</p> <p>I10: We cannot say 100% because that tradition changes over the time. And maybe in, like 50 years after us, that tradition is much, much different with what we have right now. So, the originality is again difference in that time, but there is kind of connection between these two worlds.</p> <p>NI9: I know tradition is something. You know you do over and over again... Traditional might also be like it is it is no longer in the style anymore...Authentic to me is there are certain elements that. Do not really change. They are always there, like Farsi is always there.</p>

Similar to the restaurateurs interviewed (section 5.2.1), diners frequently employ the terms "traditional" and "authentic" interchangeably (I1). This tendency can be associated with the common use of the word "traditional" when discussing authenticity in everyday Farsi language. However, interviews with both Iranian and non-Iranian diners have shown that the use of the term "traditional" is not restricted

to Farsi speakers. In fact, individuals who are not of Iranian descent also use this term when referring to authenticity (NI1).

I1: how close it is to what is traditional.

NI1: ...you feel that you are in a really traditional place.

Upon conducting the initial two interviews, a noticeable pattern emerged whereby diners utilized the terms 'authentic' and 'traditional' interchangeably (I1 and NI1). In response, the researcher introduced a question related to both terms in subsequent interviews (see Section 4.7.2). The interviewees were divided into two groups; those who considered the two terms substitutable, and those who saw them as distinct.

The first group regarded the two terms as interchangeable and having the same connotation (NI2), by both referring to one's roots (NI3).

NI2: I think we can do the same traditionally in authentic can be under the same umbrella.

NI3: I realise authenticity for me also. Equals to old. Yeah, I forgot to mention. I think that's quite important. Old. Well, it is a big word. But something more based and rooted in traditions.

NI9 suggests that the differences between "traditional" and "authentic" are insignificant and that using either is a matter of choice. Moreover, in this case, the word choice is unlikely to affect how customers perceive the authenticity of ethnic restaurants and using them interchangeably can lead to similar outcomes.

NI9: the differences are just so small, does it matter? Does the wording matter to someone? Like if someone sees traditional over authentic? You know next to the restaurant name or something? I do not know if that would change my perception or not.

On the other hand, the second group separate the two terms, associating 'traditional' with something prone to change over time and 'authenticity' with

originality (I7). They acknowledged that while there might be a connection between the two terms (I9), 'traditional' and 'authentic' are not attributed with similar meanings.

I7: Traditional kind of feels like something old, but authentic is something that is close to its origin could say, so they won't be the same for me.

I9: They are sort of interlocked.

Interviewee NI4 believes that the existence of 'authenticity' is not tied to the presence of 'tradition'. However, it is likely for something traditional also to be authentic, acknowledging the potential link between the two terms while emphasising their independent existence.

NI4: I think something can be authentic without being traditional because cultures change, things change, times change.... authenticity does not have to be traditional, the traditional thing, I would say is likely authentic so.

Based on the opinions of the interviewees, the main factor that distinguishes 'tradition' and 'authenticity' is the level of adaptability. While 'tradition' can undergo change over time, 'authenticity' remains unaffected by external factors (I10 and NI9).

I10: We cannot say 100% because that tradition changes over the time. And maybe in, like 50 years after us, that tradition is much, much different with what we have right now. So, the originality is again difference in that time, but there is kind of connection between these two worlds.

NI9: I know tradition is something. You know you do over and over again... Traditional might also be like it is no longer in the style anymore...Authentic to me is there are certain elements that. Do not really change. They are always there, like Farsi is always there.

6.3.3 Theme 3 – Food has the final say (or not)

Table 6.10 presents the identified key quotations related to the significance of food in diners' perception of authenticity in Iranian ethnic restaurants.

Table 6.10 A summary of Category 1, Theme 3 - Food has the final say (or not), and its related key quotations

Category 1, Theme 3, Food has the final say (or not)			
No	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
3	Food has the final say (or not)	N/A	<p>NI2: it is an experience. It is not just about eating the food, otherwise I could just order it to be delivered to my home.</p> <p>I7: you're not going to just taste their food; you're going to see what's their culture and how they react to people.</p> <p>I8: what you feel about the overall not only food but also the way that they treat you.</p> <p>I2: Authentic for me means food</p> <p>I1: How close the food is to the one that is served in the country.</p> <p>NI3: I think for me the meal would be winning.... I would even dare say no. I think [it is] the food that I am coming back to.</p> <p>I3: I went to [a] restaurant. They designed it like an English [restaurant]. It is OK for me. And the food was same taste of the Iranians. It [design] does not matter the food was important for me</p> <p>I8: It depends on the situation. For example, when I want to invite...one of my friends from different background, I may actually bring them into a more authentic Persian restaurant. But when I go by myself or with my close friends, I focus more on the quality of the food and the price of course.</p>

It was discussed earlier in the literature review (see section 2.2) that having food and feeling full (survival) is usually not the ultimate goal of visiting an ethnic restaurant, and it is the overall experience that matters (Mitchell and Hall, 2004; Tey et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2019; Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007). Otherwise, customers can simply order the food to have it in the comfort of their homes.

NI2: it is an experience. It is not just about eating the food, otherwise I could just order it to be delivered to my home.

Diners believe that their experience at a restaurant is profoundly impacted by how they are treated and welcomed, which is often influenced by cultural factors. And food is not the only element that can shape their perceptions of the restaurant.

I7: you are not going to just taste their food; you're going to see what's their culture and how they react to people.

I8: what you feel about the overall not only food but also the way that they treat you.

On the other hand, when the interviewees were asked about their definition of authenticity, it was interesting to see that some of the diners referred to food as the main or even only significant criterion to measure authenticity. They expressed that the food, including the item, portion, and presentation, which is offered back in Iran is the ultimate standard for measuring authenticity and the marker for judging what is provided outside the country.

I2: Authentic for me means food.

I1: How close the food is to the one that is served in the country.

For some diners, food plays the most significant role in creating repeat business and customer loyalty towards a restaurant, and they prioritise it above everything else (NI3). One of the Iranian diners (I3) mentioned that quality food, being the main factor when dining in a restaurant, could outweigh other elements, such as the interior design and decoration of the restaurant, making them negligible and less significant.

NI3: I think for me the meal would be winning.... I would even dare say no. I think [it is] the food that I am coming back to.

I3: I went to [a] restaurant. They designed it like an English [restaurant]. It is OK for me. And the food was same taste of the Iranians. It [design] does not matter the food was important for me.

In certain circumstances, the importance of food can vary depending on the occasion and the relationship between the people dining together. Iranians, when eating alone or with close companions, prioritize receiving good value for their money and want quality food at a reasonable price. Interestingly, when the primary purpose of dining is to showcase Iranian culture to non-Iranians, food may have a lower priority. Interviewee I8 referred to these situations as going to a "more authentic restaurant," which raises questions about their perception of authenticity and whether they equate it with tradition.

I8: It depends on the situation. For example, when I want to invite...one of my friends from different background, I may actually bring them into a more authentic Persian restaurant. But when I go by myself or with my close friends, I focus more on the quality of the food and the price of course.

6.4 Category 2 Iranian hospitality and dining culture (Diners)

Category 2 covers the theme of Mehman Navazi (Iranian hospitality), the interviewees' experience of it, and how it is expected and perceived by both Iranian and non-Iranian diners. A summary of its themes is presented in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 Summary of Category 2, Theme 1, Mehman Navazi (Hospitality) and its relevant key quotations

No	Category 2, Iranian Hospitality and Dining Culture	
	Theme	Subtheme
1	Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)	N/A
2	The battle of payment	N/A

6.4.1 Theme 1 – Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)

The concept of Iranian hospitality was briefly discussed in section 2.5, and it is interesting to review some of the first-hand examples from both Iranian and non-Iranian diners. A summary of Theme 1, Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality), and its key quotations is presented in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11 A summary of Category 2, Theme 1, Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality), and its key quotations

No	Category 2, Iranian Hospitality and Dining Culture		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Mehman-Navazi (Iranian Hospitality)	N/A	<p>NI2: Approachable, likeable. Nice.</p> <p>NI10: I mean, it was unbelievable. What do you want? What can I give you?</p> <p>NI1: The first time they provide me the tea for hospitality while I am waiting for my services.</p> <p>I7: So as Iranians, we are kind of famous because of being hospitality and generally be good with the guests. And when you choose somewhere to eat, if you want to choose a restaurant you prefer somewhere that you feel like welcome.</p> <p>I4: the hospitality, I think mainly there is a focus on the hospitality, and this is back to the...our culture</p> <p>I8: we boast about our hospitality.</p> <p>I1: I think when they want to be hospitable to someone. They just talk to them so friendly they talk about themselves,, they are just so friendly they make jokes were appropriate.</p> <p>I3: How they behave with customers and how they make friendly for all the people. The staff to be caring, hospitality, friendly and Even I saw some restaurant, I went the manager or the boss of the restaurant when every time see your families come and say come. Hi, how are you? And say be friendly for us and sometimes the food is not good on there, but we just going for friendly.</p>

When non-Iranian diners are asked about their thought about Iranian hospitality, in some cases, general terms such as “approachable” and “nice” were addressed (NI2), and in other instances, the interviewees referred to Iranian hospitality as “unbelievable” in a positive way (NI10). Moreover, in a few cases, they eagerly recalled their previous experiences of visiting ethnic Iranian restaurants and receiving free a food item (NI1), which is one of the hospitality practices of the Iranian culture (see section 2.5)

NI2: Approachable, likeable. Nice.

NI10: I mean, it was unbelievable. [they kept asking] What do you want? What can I give you?

NI1: The first time they provide me the tea for hospitality while I am waiting for my services.

Some non-Iranian diners have limited to no expectations, from the dining experience due to a lack of extensive previous exposure and/or absence of an in-depth familiarity with Iranian hospitality, therefore a small effort by the restaurant can go a long way and exceed their expectations. Thus, a simple yet impactful strategy that ethnic restaurants can use to positively impact the diners' experiences is to follow their referent cultural hospitality practices, which could be niche and novel to the diners.

The Iranian diners who were raised in Iran or who have experienced and been exposed to Iranian hospitality outside the country demonstrate a thorough understanding of it. They can recognise specific details that may remain unnoticed by non-Iranians and being welcome in the restaurant is a factor which can shape their decision-making when choosing between Iranian restaurants (I7).

I7: And when you choose somewhere to eat, if you want to choose a restaurant you prefer somewhere that you feel like welcome.

To them, hospitality is an integral and renowned (I7) part of the Iranian culture (I4), and something to be proud of (I8).

I7: So as Iranians, we are kind of famous because of being hospitality and generally be good with the guests.

I4: The hospitality, I think mainly there is a focus on the hospitality, and this is back to the...our culture.

I8: We boast about our hospitality.

Iranian diners place great importance on understanding the dos and don'ts of hospitality. They highlight the significance of adhering to conversational etiquette

dynamics (I3) and using discretion in humour, emphasising the need to make jokes only when appropriate (I1). Authentic hospitality, as understood by Iranians, goes beyond mere pleasantries; it can override any potential negative aspects of the food and can extend to creating an experience with the potential to become the primary reason for visiting a restaurant.

I3: how they behave with customers and how they [are] friendly [with] all the people. The staff to be caring, hospitable, friendly... some restaurant I [I have been to], [every time] the manager or the boss of the restaurant see your families come and say come. Hi, how are you? And say be friendly [with] us and sometimes the food is not good on there, but we just going for friendly.

I1: I think when they want to be hospitable to someone, they just talk to them so friendly, they talk about themselves...they are just so friendly they make jokes were appropriate.

6.4.2 Theme 2 – The battle of payment

The information coded for Theme 2, where extracted from one of the interviews only (NI9), and while the mono source can categorise as a ‘thin’ theme (Noyes et al., 2019), due to the importance, significance, and novelty, it was decided to include the theme in the research. A summary of the relevant key quotations can be found in Table 6.12.

Table 6.12 A summary of Category 2, Theme 2, The battle of payment, and its key quotations

No	Category 2, Theme 2, the battle of payment		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	The battle of payment	N/A	NI9: Is there like a? Certain way you pay. Is there a certain way?
			NI9: Do they have a tipping culture?
			NI9: The fight for the honour and the privilege, you know, it is like an honorary badge.

The non-Iranian diner brought up an intriguing question from the researcher, seeking clarification on whether Iranian culture incorporates specific practices for payment and a distinctive tipping culture. The researcher explained that in Iran,

insisting on paying for others' meals is a symbol of Taarof and Ehteram (see page 25), which usually turns into a friendly battle of one persuading the other and can even lead to tactical actions, including making excuses to leave the table and secretly paying for the whole table. It is essential to note that it is commonly regarded as disrespectful to cover the expenses for older individuals, particularly those who hold higher positions within the family hierarchy.

NI9: Is there like a certain way you pay. Is there a certain way?

NI9: Do they have a tipping culture?

Upon these explanations, the interviewee (born and raised in the US) shared the differences and similarities of the payment and tipping culture of their country and was amazed at how Iranians can turn something as simple as payment into an honour and privilege.

NI9: The fight for the honour and the privilege, you know, it is like an honorary badge.

Consequently, when non-Iranian diners observe such cultural practices, they may potentially perceive them as unique and therefore authentic, influencing their overall perception of the dining experience. However, it is crucial to highlight that these practices occur organically and without direct intervention from restaurants. Therefore, categorizing them as deliberate strategies employed by restaurateurs is unlikely.

6.5 Category 3 Visual Elements and Strategies (Diners)

A summary of the themes and subthemes related to category 3 – visual elements and strategies (diners) - can be found in Table 6.13. Five themes linked to the visual elements and strategies are discussed and, where applicable, they have been broken into further subthemes.

Table 6.13 Summary of category 3, visual elements, and strategies (Diners), its themes and subthemes

Category 3, Visual Elements and Strategies		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	Restaurant Exterior	Beyond the Sofreh ¹²
		Let's judge the restaurant by its name
2	It is what's inside that matters	Interior design and decoration
		Most famous but most used
		Food preparation methods
		Colour Palette
3	Restaurant staff	Staff ethnicity
		Staff Uniforms
4	What's on the menu?	Menu design
		Call me by my name (and in my language)
		Menu language
5	What's on the table	Hummus or no Hummus? That is the question
		Tableware and Serveware (Chini e Zarrin)
		Food portion
		Food presentation

6.5.1 Theme 1 – Restaurant Exterior

The following section covers the theme of Restaurant Exterior, including the subthemes 'Exterior design and decoration', discussing the expectations and perceptions of diners regarding the exterior design of the restaurant, and 'Let's

¹² / Sofré/ : "A piece of cloth that is spread on the floor, and on which dishes of food are placed at meal times. Since sitting at dining tables has become increasingly common nowadays, the word may also refer to an ordinary tablecloth" (Omidshar, 2006).

judge the restaurant by its name' that discusses diners' expectations regarding the restaurant signage and name. Due to the length of this theme, a summary of each subtheme and its relevant key quotations is presented at the beginning of each subtheme.

6.5.1.1 Subtheme – Beyond the Sofreh

The first subtheme investigates diners' perceptions and opinions towards the exterior design and decoration of Iranian ethnic restaurants and their link with authenticity. A summary of the subtheme is presented in Table 6.14.

Table 6.14 Summary of Category 3, Theme 1, Subtheme 1, Exterior Design and Strategies and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 1, Subtheme 1, Exterior Design, and decoration		
No	Subtheme	Quotations
1	Exterior design & decoration	<p>I10: we see different like type of restaurants here like Asian, Mexican and all of this and they somehow just design their viewings based on their culture. So basically, if the restaurant that we are in. Is somehow designing in a way that it is like our culture having some special object that reminds you of your culture?</p> <p>I10: For example. We have those shapes [Paisley]. Yeah, well, some of them, they use it to design their mirrors. Like mirror is something very I think important in our culture.</p> <p>NI3: I think the choice of colours is an interesting one. It is how. How is that related to Iran? I know I've seen people using colours of flags.... I think [it is] also a marketing element. I guess one needs to remember.</p> <p>I5: Some words in Persian are important for me, and also maybe some symbols, some signs of our own culture. It is the meaning of authenticity for me from the exterior designing of the restaurant.</p> <p>I6: Yeah, I expect it to be. If it would be here in Farsi, flashing neon lights, something like that.</p> <p>NI4: I have no concept of what there actually is in version. But you know, I'd imagine they'd do something as, like, generic as possible to try and draw people to it. So, it is like. You know, full on it might be like, you know, a big statue like, you know, if I imagine it like an Indian restaurant, right, I'd imagine they'd be like a big statue of an elephant. And then, like some palm trees. And like, you know, if they wanted to draw people to it, that might not necessarily be there. Hey, they might cause, obviously London is so diverse.</p> <p>NI10: I wouldn't say that I have an expectation of how the external is gonna look like</p> <p>I9: Probably I won't make judgments from the from the front of the shop, I would say. A lot will depend whether if it is somewhere that I haven't been there before either, I will rely on, you know, it is something that someone</p>

Category 3, Theme 1, Subtheme 1, Exterior Design, and decoration		
No	Subtheme	Quotations
		recommended or we are just trying to be go wide and say that, OK, let's try something new and see what happens. So, it is not that the look of it is not going to attract me
		NI7: I do not think it would matter as much to me like... if I read reviews and it was like this is like authentic, it wouldn't really matter what the restaurant looked like from the outside. I do not think.

A restaurant's exterior design is one of the elements that can impact customers' perceptions and experiences in different ways. Signage, one of the core elements of the exterior design of a restaurant, has proved to impact the customers' purchase intention (Song and Yang, 2023) and perception of authenticity in ethnic restaurants (Ebster and Guist, 2005) in ethnic restaurants. As stated by participants I10 and NI3, the exterior design can represent the referent culture of ethnic restaurants, and using particular shapes, materials or colours of the flag can be a useful marketing strategy for ethnic restaurants.

I10: we see different like type of restaurants here like Asian, Mexican and all of this and they somehow just design their viewings based on their culture. So basically, if the restaurant that we are in. Is somehow designing in a way that it is like our culture having some special object that reminds you of your culture?

I10: For example. We have those shapes [Paisley]. Yeah, well, some of them, they use it to design their mirrors. Like mirror is something very I think important in our culture.

NI3: I think the choice of colours is an interesting one. It is how. How is that related to Iran? I know I've seen people using colours of flags.... I think [it is] also a marketing element. I guess one needs to remember.

Iranian diners express a preference for seeing Farsi words displayed on the exterior of a restaurant, as this practice can enhance the perception of authenticity even before patrons enter the establishment. Beyond language, the design itself plays a role in communicating authenticity. An example of this is the use of neon lights on the exterior, a common practice in Kabab shops and casual dining

restaurants in Iran (Figure 6.1). Observing the same practice outside of Iran can create a familiar and culturally resonant ambience for Iranian diners, resulting in a heightened perception.

I5: Some words in Persian are important for me, and also maybe some symbols, some signs of our own culture. It is the meaning of authenticity for me from the exterior design of the restaurant.

I6: Yeah, I expect it to be. If it would be here in Farsi, flashing neon lights, something like that.



Figure 6.1 Example of a neon light on the window of a restaurant in Iran (photo by the researcher)

It can be challenging for diners with little experience of Iranian hospitality or restaurants to form expectations about the exterior design of the restaurant. Due to a lack of experience and knowledge, they may rely on stereotypical and clichéd geographical images (NI4).

NI4: I have no concept of what there actually is in version. But you know, I'd imagine they'd do something as, like, generic as possible to try and draw people to it. So, it is like. You know, full on it might be like, you know, a big statue like, you know, if I imagine it like an Indian restaurant, right, I'd imagine they'd be like a big statue of an elephant. And then, like some palm trees. And like, you know, if they wanted to draw people to it, that might not necessarily be there. Hey, they might cause, obviously London is so diverse.

The exterior design and decor of a restaurant do not always serve as crucial factors for everyone when deciding to visit there or evaluate its authenticity. The importance of these factors varies among different diners (NI10). For some, the decision to visit a restaurant and/or the perception of authenticity hinges either on

their adventurous instinct, prompting spontaneous and random choices, or on word of mouth (WOM) (I9) and online reviews (EWOM) (NI7).

NI10: I wouldn't say that I have an expectation of how the external is gonna look like

I9: probably I won't make judgments from the from the front of the shop, I would say a lot will depend whether if it is somewhere that I haven't been there before either, I will rely on, you know, it is something that someone recommended or we are just trying to be go wild and say that, OK, let's try something new and see what happens. So, it is not that the look of it is not going to attract me.

NI7: I do not think it would matter as much to me like if I read reviews and it was like this is like authentic, it wouldn't really matter what the restaurant looked like from the outside. I do not think.

6.5.1.2 Subtheme – Let's judge a restaurant by its name

The second subtheme explores the significance of restaurants' signage in forming and influencing diners' perceptions of authenticity. A summary of the subtheme and its key quotations is presented in Table 6.15.

Table 6.15 A summary of Category 3, Theme 1, Subtheme 2, Let's judge a restaurant by its name and its key quotations

No	Category 3, Theme 1, subtheme 2 Let's judge a restaurant by its name	
	Subtheme	Key quotations
2	Let's judge a restaurant by its name	<p>I10: Those restaurants that they wrote their names in Persian or Farsi, those are the ones that they are somehow bold.... So, this is the first thing that catches my eye and draws my attention to it.</p> <p>I13: When you are driving in the road. Sometimes you are looking for somewhere to eat food, and you also knew in that area you do not know how well you even for doing some. The job. And by accident, you see, oh, it is a restaurant. Iranian restaurant.</p> <p>I8: [it] draws the attention of people, especially people with the same culture like Iranians, Tajikistani and Afghans who can also read Farsi and actually this actually helped them to feel more close, to feel that oh, this is this, this part of the word may belong to us and our friends.</p> <p>NI3: That [both languages] would be better for me. The other one [Farsi only] ...like no idea where I am going.</p> <p>I9: It would be good if it is written in Farsi as well, but I understand you know, because we are in London, they need to, you know, write in English. So, they will have, you know, international customers as well.</p>

No	Category 3, Theme 1, subtheme 2 Let's judge a restaurant by its name	
Subtheme	Key quotations	
	<p>I7: I do not mind if it is in both languages, because of course there are other people that fancy going to that restaurant, but I prefer to see something in Persian.</p>	<p>NI2: I have no idea. I haven't really given a thought about that. I suppose that it has. To say something related to Persian food, at least just to distinguish. because sometimes they have some Arabic writings that I cannot fully [understand].</p>
	<p>I4: I think in my side when I see the Persian phones in my mind it comes that OK I can trust to this restaurant rather than Finglish one you know? But it is understandable they use the English one, but I really disappointed when I see the English one because the Finglish one is not applicable nor for the Persian people or nor for the other people. So, it would be wonderful if you see the Persian fonts and also the English. The complete English and origin English number for that one.</p>	<p>I7: Look really ugly and it will not even make sense for nor Iranian and nor English people. that is something just messed up.</p>
	<p>NI3: I think it would. Be nice to. See written where it is English and translated in Farsi beneath that both.</p>	<p>I1: I think just in the exterior, having something written in Persian.... Exactly the name or anything it has, should be written in Persian. I think that would be nice. Will attract people... Probably everybody, but the person who could read it would be more attracted, I suppose.</p>
	<p>I9: But maybe you know it would give me a slightly even a little bit hidden. Secretly a better feeling if I see that.</p>	<p>I10: Yes, talking about being its true self, so an Iranian restaurant, its true self is that everything should be written in Farsi, and it somehow stands out between other like restaurants around it.</p>
	<p>NI3: I'd say it would make some difference, because if we think about another example comes in my mind. Chinese. Yeah, I've gone to Chinese that I have done. I have seen often they do, I think, often put on signs. Their way of writing was what's the Chinese? Yeah, I have seen that that already in a sense gives triggers for that that's going to be Chinese. but it would still make not big, but I think it would make a difference.</p>	<p>NI4: if I imagine it to be really authentic, I'd imagine that the sign itself would be written in the language of the country. It is from in big and then actually maybe in small written in British English America or whatever, because the other way around would seem strange.</p>
	<p>I9: The name to begin with. Obviously, it should be something that you know has some meaning. Maybe a Persian name or something rather than just, you know, take away or whatever.</p>	<p>NI10: I suppose, like the name would have to sort of connote something that relates to Iran or something in Farsi. Maybe it is the name of the city that the people come from, or so that's kind of the usual expectation, I suppose, or that that would sort of enable it to sit in a box, I guess.</p>

No	Category 3, Theme 1, subtheme 2 Let's judge a restaurant by its name	
Subtheme	Key quotations	
	<p>NI3: I think the word Persian is quite significant. Quite because you know, if not many people know [An Iranian name].</p>	<p>NI2: So it has to be written in both languages, so it appeals to both targets because they know they carry a certain level of, you know entity that's good enough to attract these kind of people because certain restaurants they lose their track of things because obviously they cater only for, say, the Westerns people that they are not experts or they, they do not know the food, so they lose that authenticity.</p>
	<p>I3: I am going to bring example one of the Persian restaurants here was opened in 2008-2009. And the name was Hell. Restaurant e Jahannam. [Researcher: Uh-huh. Oh my God. Why would they call the restaurant hell?] I do not know why it was the reasons. Yeah, and then they it was closed after six, yeah [Researcher: Oh, maybe they wanted to talk about hell cardamom that we put in tea.].</p>	<p>I4: About the name of the restaurants. You know the name of restaurant is also important. Uh and in and also the relationship with the name and also the atmosphere for example, for the local sandwich, providing for example, that one. You cannot say OK. This is the Persepolis, OK?</p>
	<p>I7: The first time that I saw that signage from my point of view was kind of feeling like, yeah, I should definitely go to that place. Finally, a Persian restaurant in my area. But when you look at from the other people point of view, see that that is not really nice and welcoming...so I would say both would be perfect.NI2: if it is only written in their language, how am I supposed to know what it is? Although I know what it is, but I feel like I should not go there in the first place. Yeah, yeah, because they only advertising towards a specific group of people...I do not know if I am going to be welcome or not. I just. I'll just avoid it. if it is written only in in Farsi then it, I feel like I am not welcome there because I am not part of the community. So initially I even said Arabic so I cannot distinguish from one from another, so therefore I am not the target. I am not the audience. I do not know what I am I should expect from there. I do not know if I am going to be welcome or not. I just. I'll just avoid it.</p>	<p>NI9: I might be intimidated, but I probably might still go in and like, maybe check out the decor, see if I am even welcomed.</p>

Iranian diners believe that using the Farsi alphabet on the signage and the restaurant's exterior can help the restaurant stand out and attract the attention of potential diners (I10).

I10: Those restaurants that they wrote their names in Persian or Farsi, those are the ones that they are somehow bold..... So, this is the first thing that catches my eye and draws my attention to it.

I3: When you are driving in the road. Sometimes you are looking for somewhere to eat food, and you also knew in that area you do not know how well you even for doing some job. And by accident, you see, oh, it is a restaurant. Iranian restaurant.

Furthermore, in a country like the United Kingdom, where the predominant language is English, encountering a familiar language (Farsi) can instil a sense of comfort and security for Farsi-speaking diners. This inclusion offers them a connection to their cultural roots, fostering a feeling of home and belonging within the restaurant environment.

I8: [it] draws the attention of people, especially people with the same culture like Iranians, Tajikistani and Afghans who can also read Farsi and actually this actually helped them to feel more close, to feel that oh, this is this, this part of the world may belong to us and our friends.

The preceding discussion should not be misinterpreted as suggesting that Iranians would be opposed to encountering English writing on signage. On the contrary, they recognise the necessity of English as a means of communication, particularly for non-Iranian diners in a restaurant located outside of Iran and acknowledge that the necessity of including the English language cannot be denied.

NI3: That [both languages] would be better for me. The other one [Farsi only] like no idea where I am going.

However, their perspective emphasises that the use of the English language should be seen as a complementary strategy alongside Farsi text, rather than serving as the sole option.

I9: It would be good if it is written in Farsi as well, but I understand you know, because we are in London, they need to, you know, write in English. So, they will have, you know, international customers as well.

I7: I do not mind if it is in both languages, because of course there are other people that fancy going to that restaurant, but I prefer to see something in Persian.

In several instances, the interviewees not only expressed the need for an indication of Iranian food -in some way- in the signage but also showed that they could not distinguish between Farsi and other languages that have visually similar alphabets

such as Arabic. Therefore, unclear signage might lead to the misjudgement of the type of restaurant.

NI2: I have no idea. I haven't really given a thought about that. I suppose that it has to say something related to Persian food, at least just to distinguish. Because sometimes they have some Arabic writings that I cannot fully [understand].

Another noteworthy consideration is the utilisation of what is commonly known as Fingilish¹³. Iranians may accept its use on restaurant signage, allowing non-Iranians to read the establishment's name. However, relying solely on the Fingilish version is generally viewed unfavourably. While the Farsi language conveys a sense of trustworthiness and confidence, the exclusive use of Fingilish could be interpreted as a "lack of identity," diminishing the establishment's perceived authenticity and cultural connection.

I4: I think in my side when I see the Persian fonts in my mind it comes that OK, I can trust to this restaurant rather than the Fingilish one you know? But it is understandable they use the English one, but I really disappointed when I see the Fingilish one because the Fingilish one is not applicable nor for the Persian people or nor for the other people.

I7: Look really ugly and it will not even make sense for nor Iranian and nor English people. that is something just messed up.

On one occasion, a point was made about having the signage or "something" written in Farsi on the exterior of the restaurant as it would be "nice", give Iranians "a better feeling" and could attract both Iranian and non-Iranian customers.

During the interviews, emphasis was placed on the idea of incorporating some form of Farsi writing on the exterior of the restaurant. The rationale behind this suggestion was that it would contribute to a "nice" ambience, evoking a sense of

¹³ Writing Farsi words with English alphabets following the sound of each letter, A combination of words Farsi and English (Farsi language have unique alphabets different to the English language).

pleasantness, and potentially attracting a diverse clientele, both Iranian and non-Iranian alike. The notion is that such inclusion not only appeals to a sense of cultural familiarity for Iranians but also adds a distinctive and inviting touch to the overall appeal of the establishment.

NI3: I think it would be nice to see written where it is English and translated in Farsi beneath that both.

I1: I think just in the exterior, having something written in Persian... Exactly the name or anything it has, should be written in Persian. I think that would be nice. Will attract people..... probably everybody, but the person who could read it would be more attracted, I suppose.

I9: But maybe you know it would give me a slightly even a little bit hidden, secretly a better feeling if I see that.

The inclusion of writing in the ethnic language extends beyond mere pleasantness; and might stand as a symbol of authenticity (Magnini, Miller, and Kim, 2011). This practice signals the restaurant's commitment to its cultural roots, serving as a tangible expression of its dedication to maintaining an authentic connection with the referenced culture.

I10: Yes, talking about being its true self, so an Iranian restaurant, its true self is that everything should be written in Farsi, and it somehow stands out between other like restaurants around it.

NI3: I'd say it would make some difference, because if we think about another example comes in my mind. Chinese. Yeah, I've gone to Chinese that I have done. I have seen often they do, I think, often put on signs. Their way of writing was what's the Chinese? Yeah, I have seen that that already in a sense gives triggers for that that's going to be Chinese. but it would still make not big, but I think it would make a difference.

The expectation for restaurant signage to feature a language that corresponds to the restaurant's ethnicity is not limited to Iranian diners, as even non-Iranians, usually not familiar with the language, would find it odd and unexpected to come

upon an ethnic restaurant's signage that is only or predominantly in the English language.

NI4: if I imagine it to be really authentic, I'd imagine that the sign itself would be written in the language of the country. It is from in big and then actually maybe in small written in British English American or whatever, because the other way around would seem strange.

The participants underscored the significance of choosing a name with cultural meaning, specifically favouring Iranian names or those that reflect Iranian identity. There is a clear emphasis on steering away from generic names and opting for choices that carry cultural weight and significance. This would help the restaurant to “sit in a box” (NI10) and clearly communicate its business model and objectives.

I9: The name to begin with. Obviously, it should be something that you know has some meaning. Maybe a Persian name or something rather than just, you know, take away or whatever.

NI10: I suppose, like the name would have to sort of connote something that relates to Iran or something in Farsi. Maybe it is the name of the city that the people come from, or so that's kind of the usual expectation, I suppose, or that that would sort of enable it to sit in a box, I guess.

When a participant was presented with a hypothetical Iranian name, they emphasized the potential incorporation of the term "Persian" as well. This addition serves the purpose of providing clarity for non-Iranian diners who may not be familiar with the meaning of the restaurant name, ensuring that they can still discern the cultural context and nature of the establishment.

NI3: I think the word Persian is quite significant. Quite because you know, if not many people know [An Iranian name].

NI2: So, it has to be written in both languages, so it appeals to both targets because they know they carry a certain level of, you know entity that's good enough to attract these kind of people because certain restaurants they lose their track of things because obviously they cater only for, say, the Westerns people that they are not experts or they, they do not know the food, so they lose that authenticity

The language featured on the restaurant's signage is not the sole factor influencing diners' perceptions and the overall image of the establishment. Another crucial consideration involves vigilance concerning words with similar pronunciations but different meanings in the two languages. A participant illustrated this point with an intriguing example, citing the choice of Hel – هل (the term for cardamom in Farsi) as the name for a restaurant. Unfortunately, the selection did not take into account the existence of the word "Hell" in English. While it cannot be definitively established that the chosen name was the sole reason for the restaurant's closure after six months, it is foreseeable that naming a restaurant "Hell" might not have contributed to shaping a pleasant image in the minds of potential diners.

I3: I am going to bring example one of the Persian restaurants here was opened in 2008-2009. And the name was Hell. Restaurant e Jahannam. [Researcher: Uh-huh. Oh my God. Why would they call the restaurant hell?] I do not know why it was the reasons. Yeah, and then they it was closed after six, yeah [Researcher: Oh, maybe they wanted to talk about hell cardamom that we put in tea.]

Talking about the impact of the name, it is also important that the chosen name matches the concept and atmosphere of the place. For instance, diner I4 mentioned that a name like 'Persepolis'¹⁴ cannot be a suitable match for a sandwich shop or a fast-food shop, however, it can be used in other types of restaurants such as full-service or fine-dining restaurants.

I4: About the name of the restaurants. You know the name of restaurant is also important. Uh and in and also the relationship with the name and also the atmosphere for example, for the local sandwich, providing for example, that one. You cannot say OK. This is the Persepolis, OK?

¹⁴ "The ruined monuments of the acropolis of the city of Pārsa, the dynastic center of the Achaemenid Persian kings, located in the plain of Marvdašt, some 57 km northeast of Shiraz. One of the best-known sites of the ancient world, Persepolis was registered by the UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage in 1979" (Shapur Shahbazi, 2012).

While Iranian customers would love the idea of Farsi signage, it is important to keep in mind that when a restaurant is located outside of the referent country, the customer base includes a variety of people from different backgrounds. And if the restaurant's goal is to target everyone, all the elements in the restaurant should be planned and designed taking that into consideration (I7).

I7: The first time that I saw that signage from my point of view was kind of feeling like, yeah, I should definitely go to that place. Finally, a Persian restaurant in my area. But when you look at from the other people point of view, see that that is not really nice and welcoming...so I would say both would be perfect.

From an alternative perspective, having the restaurant name exclusively in Farsi can lead to unfavourable outcomes. Non-Iranian customers may perceive this as unwelcoming, experiencing feelings of intimidation or, in some cases, opting to avoid the restaurant altogether. The potential for such misunderstandings highlights the importance of striking a balance in the presentation of the restaurant's identity to ensure a welcoming atmosphere for a diverse clientele.

NI2: if it is only written in their language, how am I supposed to know what it is? Although I know what it is, but I feel like I should not go there in the first place. Yeah, yeah, because they only advertising towards a specific group of people...I do not know if I am going to be welcome or not. I just. I'll just avoid it. if it is written only in in Farsi then it, I feel like I am not welcome there because I am not part of the community. So initially I even said Arabic so I cannot distinguish from one from another, so therefore I am not the target. I am not the audience. I do not know what I am I should expect from there. I do not know if I am going to be welcome or not. I just. I'll just avoid it.

NI9: I might be intimidated, but I probably might still go in and like, maybe check out the decor, see if I am even welcomed.

6.5.2 Theme 2 – It is what is inside that matters

Usually, what lies within a restaurant holds greater importance for diners than its external appearance. The focus tends to shift inward, as diners prioritise the

ambience, service, and overall atmosphere within the establishment, recognising these internal elements as pivotal contributors to their overall dining experience.

A summary of the subthemes and key quotations, related to the theme ‘It is what is inside that matters’ is presented in Table 6.16.

Table 6.16 Summary of Category 3, Theme 2, its subthemes, and the key quotations.

Category 3, Theme 2, It is what is inside that matters		
No	Theme	Subtheme
2	It is what is inside that matters	Interior design and decoration
		The most famous but most used elements
		Clay oven and charcoal grill
		Colour Palette and lighting

6.5.2.1 Subtheme - Interior design and decoration

Table 6.17 presents a summary of subtheme 1, Interior design and decoration and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 2.

Table 6.17 A summary of Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 1, Interior design, and decoration and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 1, Interior design, and decoration		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Interior design and decoration	<p>NI1: ... another thing is that decoration of the place you feel really that you are there ... it hold you from your place to their home country, so when you feel that this decoration reflect their civil... civilians and these things you feel that you are in a really traditional place.</p> <p>I10: Us people who are away from home, I think environment is the first thing that catches our eyes. So, when we get to a restaurant which is basically looks like our restaurants at home or it has like our ancient things around in the environment and you feel like when you are walking inside the restaurant, you are getting away from London and it is something like different from other restaurants or other places and you somehow feel like home. This is what I say. It is like a first thing that catches my eye.</p> <p>I1: ... Yeah, design I think would make a difference.</p> <p>I1: I think in the design they should use maybe traditional symbols of the country in a Persian restaurant or a.... [thinks for a few seconds]. Maybe on people seats using cushions and Iranian carpets maybe... that is something traditional.</p> <p>NI1: ...like the paintings, portraits...</p> <p>I8: we can expect lot lots of Persian arts... I think Persian drawings anything related</p> <p>NI9: It matters to me. Because I feel like if I am going somewhere that is authentic. I am getting a real taste of the food from that country. Whereas if</p>

Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 1, Interior design, and decoration		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
		<p>something does not look or feel as authentic, I might question how authentic the food is or the quality is...</p> <p>NI9: Sit differently. Some people sit on the ground, some people just sit in chairs.</p> <p>I5: And also, we have some benches for dining in Persian restaurants. I like to see some. There is some benches or beds.</p> <p>I7: I would prefer an open space, something like back home with benches and all this stuff, but I can imagine that that cannot be really applicable practical here in London they really do not have that much space.</p>

The interior design of a restaurant is a fundamental element with significant potential to shape the overall experience of the diners and their perception of authenticity (ÖZDEMİR-GÜZEL and BAŞ, 2020). For Iranian diners, restaurant's interior is one of the initial elements to attract their attention, as it can remind them of their home country, and transfer them back to Iran (I10).

I10: Us people who are away from home, I think environment is the first thing that catches our eyes. So, when we get to a restaurant which is basically looks like our restaurants at home or it has like our ancient things around in the environment and you feel like when you are walking inside the restaurant, you are getting away from London and it is something like different from other restaurants or other places and you somehow feel like home. This is what I say. It is like a first thing that catches my eye.

The decor serves as a key factor in establishing a connection between guests and the restaurant's country of origin, evoking a sense of attachment to the culture and the place.

I1: ... Yeah, design I think would make a difference.

NI1: ... decoration of the place... you feel really that you are there ... it hold you from your place to their home country, so when you feel that this decoration reflect their civil... civilians and these things you feel that you are in a really traditional place.

Authenticity can be effectively communicated through interior design by utilising specific tableware, adorning the space with Persian rugs on the floor, displaying relevant pictures or paintings on the walls, and integrating Iranian symbols throughout the restaurant. Each of these elements contributes to creating an atmosphere that resonates with the cultural identity, fostering a genuine and immersive experience for diners.

I1: I think in the design they should use maybe traditional symbols of the country in a Persian restaurant or a.... [thinks for a few seconds]. Maybe on people seats using cushions and Iranian carpets maybe... that is something traditional.

NI1: ...like the paintings, portraits....

I8: we can expect lot lots of Persian arts... I think Persian drawings anything related

Consequently, the absence of cultural elements can even go as far as raising questions regarding the authenticity and quality of the food served.

NI9: It matters to me. Because I feel like if I am going somewhere that is authentic. I am getting a real taste of the food from that country. Whereas if something does not look or feel as authentic, I might question how authentic the food is or the quality is...

An intriguing visual strategy recognised by diners to cultivate an authentic environment involves incorporating cultural seating arrangements (NI9). Dining practices vary globally, with specific seating arrangements reflecting status, and cultural, social, political, or religious values (Keifer-Boyd, 1992). In the traditional Iranian setting, meals are often served on the floor with a Sofreh laid out, and the family gathers around it (Figure 6.2)

NI9: Sit differently. Some people sit on the ground, some people just sit in chairs



Figure 6.2 Painting in the main hall of Chehel Sotun showing a feast given by Shah Abbas I in honour of Vali Mohammad Khan of Turkistan in 1611AD (Photo by: Youngrobnv, 2007)

In Iran, another customary option for dining outside the homes and usually in Sofreh Khaneh¹⁵ - سفره خانه , includes a wide wooden bench-like seating arrangement known as Takht (Figure 6.3) - ¹⁶تخت:



Figure 6.3 An Iranian Sofreh Khaneh with Takht as the seating arrangement

¹⁵ Sofreh Khaneh /Sofré-Xāné/: A type of traditional restaurant in Iran, which usually has Takht instead of tables and offers a specific menu

¹⁶ /tæxt/

For Iranian diners outside of Iran, the presence of a Takht in restaurants is often seen as a sign of authenticity. It can reflect a commitment to replicating the cultural dining experience and will consequently enhance the perceived authenticity of the restaurant's representation of Iranian culinary traditions (I5). Saying that Iranian diners also acknowledge that the sparsity and absence of Takht in Iranian ethnic restaurants in London is understandable, as it requires extended space which is a rare premium in London.

I5: And also, we have some benches for dining in Persian restaurants. I like to see some. There is some benches or beds.

I7: I would prefer an open space, something like back home with benches and all this stuff, but I can imagine that that cannot be really applicable practical here in London they really do not have that much space.

6.5.2.2 Subtheme - Most famous but most used elements

Table 6.18 presents a summary of subtheme 2, The most famous but most used elements, and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 2.

Table 6.18 A summary of Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 2, The most famous but most used elements, and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 2, The most famous but most used elements		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	The most famous but most used elements	<p>I2: sometimes it is like too much things and you feel overwhelmed by that place. You cannot just sit, relax, have a lovely meal with your friends, with your family. It is like too much things at the very time because some of them are so like, small. There is too much thing in the small place. And it is not good, I think</p> <p>I2: picture of. Something that reminded you of, like Persian, food, food, OK or some like picture of some very specific ingredients of Persian food. For example, like the picture of like small jar and saffron in it, something like that or maybe like Limoo Ammani? Or some Hel. That's OK. Not like the big. Picture of Si o Se Pol.</p> <p>I4: sometimes I see they have it lots of exaggeration to provide the traditional you know it is putting me as well because they for example install lots of paintings or something or I do not know many objects OK it is very crowded and it is not really natural places and natural places and that's it. the insist on some, uh, you know, most famous but most used elements like the soldiers of the Apadana.</p>

As discussed above, the presentation of decorative elements related to the referent culture is believed to be one of the strategies to enhance the perception of authenticity among diners in ethnic restaurants. However, it is important to note that if not done strategically and in a balanced manner, such practice could lead to the opposite result, by overwhelming the diners (I2).

I2: sometimes it is like too much things and you feel overwhelmed by that place. You cannot just sit, relax, have a lovely meal with your friends, with your family. It is like too much things at the very time because some of them are so like, small. There is too much thing in the small place. And it is not good, I think.

Additional examples of challenges in interior design arise from the excessive and exaggerated use of cliché and historically focused decorations that may not have a direct connection to the culinary offerings. When the decor becomes overly reliant on stereotypical or historical elements without a clear relevance to the dining experience, it can lead to a disconnection between the visual ambience and the primary focus of the restaurant, which is the food (I2 & I4).

I2: picture of. Something that reminded you of, like Persian, food, food, OK or some like picture of some very specific ingredients of Persian food. For example, like the picture of like small jar and saffron in it, something like that or maybe like Limoo Ammani? Or some Hel. That's OK. Not like the big. Picture of Si o Se Pol.

I4: sometimes I see they have it lots of exaggeration to provide the traditional you know it is putting me as well because they for example install lots of paintings or something or I do not know many objects OK it is very crowded and it is not really natural places and natural places and that's it. the insist on some, uh, you know, most famous but most used elements like the soldiers of the Apadana.

6.5.2.3 Subtheme - Clay oven and charcoal grill

Table 6.19 presents a summary of subtheme 3, Clay oven and charcoal grill, and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 2.

Table 6.19 A summary of Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 3, Clay oven and charcoal grill, and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 3, Clay oven and charcoal grill	
No	Key Quotations
3	<p>Clay oven and charcoal grill</p> <p>I1: for Persian food there are.... There is a unique style of making that food, so if you see that style in the restaurant, so it would definitely make it more authentic.</p> <p>NI1: It matter so I feel that it is make the right way, so they are original. If you can see them when they are going to grill it, you feel that you more confident that it is original.</p> <p>NI10: It definitely makes it more authentic I want the food to be made traditionally.</p> <p>I10: When you see it, when you are visualising that specific thing which is only is related to your culture. It just brings something up in you. It is like you feel something special. Like out in the London these Big London. You have lots of different nations around. And now you are. In a restaurant which everyone shares the same nation as you, same culture as you.</p> <p>I2: The Tanoor or Manghal just reminds me for like the memory of being in Iran or memory like of my childhood and everything, but this element is not like defined for me as an authentic Persian restaurant. It is just some elements of my childhood memory and my home country.</p> <p>I6: No, I have again another good example here. Two restaurants. One has very good food and does not have a Tanoor and one does not have so good food and has a Tanoor. So, and it can be an addition to make the food authentic, but I actually the food as a whole is important and not only parts of it.</p> <p>NI9: if they cooked it a different way and it still tasted the same. You know same result type of thing. But I do think it adds that to that authentic. Percept perception, at least.</p> <p>I4: And if you use it as decoration is OK, but it is not a very big deal for me, but if they use it, they can justify the cost. For example, remember each piece of the bread they can sell to us for £2.00, but if they use it in the by the Tanoor in the, you know as a demonstration, yeah, that's it.</p>

The cooking method is one of the factors that should be considered when an ethnic dish is presented in another context (Hudgins, 2006). In Iran, the original cooking method for Kabab is using a charcoal grill (Manghal) and for bread, one of the

methods is using a clay oven (Tanoor). When the kitchen is live and the guest can directly see their food being prepared in the original way, it would make them perceive their whole dining experience as more authentic (I1), assuring them that their food is made “the right way” (NI1), following traditional methods (NI10).

I1: For Persian food there are...there is a unique style of making that food, so if you see that style in the restaurant, so it would definitely make it more authentic.

NI1: It matter so I feel that it is make the right way, so they are original. If you can see them when they are going to grill it, you feel that you more confident that it is original.

NI10: It definitely makes it more authentic I want the food to be made traditionally

For some Iranians, especially since they are located far from the country, the presence of Tanoor and Manghal is more of a nostalgic touch, rather than an indication of authenticity.

I10: When you see it, when you are visualising that specific thing which is only is related to your culture. It just brings something up in you. It is like you feel something special. Like out in the London these Big London. You have lots of different nations around. And now you are. In a restaurant which everyone shares the same nation as you, same culture as you.

I2: The Tanoor or Manghal just reminds me for like the memory of being. In Iran or memory like of my childhood and everything, but this element is not like defined for me as an authentic Persian restaurant. It is just some elements of my childhood memory and my home country.

The significance of ‘food authenticity’ is cleared here once more, when interviewee I6, shares an example of visiting two restaurants one with a Tanoor and the other without one. They mentioned that while Tanoor can be a tool to enhance the authenticity of the food, it is just a part and not sufficient to act as a guarantor for authenticity. This is supported by NI9, stating that while the same result might be

achieved from a different method, such elements can add to the perceived authenticity.

I6: No, I have again another good example here. Two restaurants. One has very good food and does not have a Tanoor and one does not have so good food and has a Tanoor. So, and it can be an addition to make the food authentic, but I actually the food as a whole is important and not only parts of it.

NI9: if they cooked it a different way and it still tasted the same. You know same result type of thing. But I do think it adds that to that authentic. Percept perception, at least.

The presence of elements like Tanoor can however work in favour of restaurant pricing, as they can help to justify the price of in this case a few pieces of freshly made bread to be higher than larger quantities of the supermarket version.

I4: And if you use it as decoration is OK, but it is not a very big deal for me, but if they use it, they can justify the cost. For example, remember each piece of the bread they can sell to us for £2.00, but if they use it in the by the Tanoor in the, you know as a demonstration, yeah, that's it.

6.5.2.4 Subtheme - Colour palette and lighting

Table 6.20 presents a summary of subtheme 4, Colour palette and lighting and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 2.

Table 6.20 A summary of Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 4, Colour palette and lighting

Category 3, Theme 2, Subtheme 4, Colour palette and lighting		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
4	Colour palette and lighting	<p>I10: warm colours. Because basically in our culture, warm colours there are really bold.</p> <p>NI5: I think if there are elements. That you associate with the place because I was just thinking of a. Polish restaurant, yeah. Which is a part of a Polish chain, and they have Amber on the wall and amber is prized in Poland.</p> <p>I2: the light is important</p> <p>I3: for the Persian restaurant. When you're going the some of them, they use it, but mostly they it is like a bit bright</p> <p>NI9: certain lighting that helps create the atmosphere</p>

The role of colour in different aspects of the customer experience is well-explored in the existing literature (e.g. Tantanatewin and Inkarojrit, 2018; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2013; Wardono, Hibino and Koyama, 2012). In the context of the restaurant colour palette, employing specific colours with cultural significance can evoke a sense of authenticity. Examples include the use of red in Chinese restaurants, blue and white in Greek establishments, gold colour in Polish restaurants (NI5), and as noted by participant I10, the use of “warm” and earthy tones in Iranian restaurants. This strategic use of colours can establish a favourable atmosphere closely aligned with the cultural references, enhancing the overall perception of the dining experience’s authenticity for patrons. The colour scheme becomes a visual cue that contributes to a more immersive and culturally resonant ambience.

NI5: I think if there are elements. That you associate with the place because I was just thinking of a Polish restaurant, yeah. Which is a part of a Polish chain, and they have Amber on the wall and amber is prized in Poland.

I10: warm colours. Because basically in our culture, warm colours there are really bold.

Like the restaurant’s colour palette, lighting is another important element (I2), which has attracted a lot of attention in the literature. It has been previously proved that generally, the colour of a room impacts the amount of food consumed (Stroebele and De Castro, 2004), or specifically in a restaurant setting the brightness of the lighting can impact the perceived intensity of the taste (Van der Heijden, Festjens, and Goukens, 2021).

I2: the light is important.

NI9: certain lighting that helps create the atmosphere

6.5.3 Theme 3 – Restaurant Staff

The following sections explore various visual aspects associated with both staff members and other diners, exploring their influence on the perception of authenticity. First, the role of staff ethnicity will be explored, followed by the uniforms worn by the staff, and finally, the impact of the ethnicity of the other restaurant guests on the perception of authenticity will be discussed. Table 6.21 presents a summary of the subthemes and key quotations related to this theme.

Table 6.21 A summary of the Category 3, Themes 3, Restaurant Staff, its subthemes and the key quotations

Category 3, Visual Elements and Strategies	
Theme	Subtheme
3 Restaurant Staff	Staff uniforms
	Staff ethnicity
	Other diners

6.5.3.1 Subtheme – Staff ethnicity

Table 6.22 presents a summary of subtheme 1, Staff ethnicity and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 3.

Table 6.22 Summary of Category 3, Theme 3, Subtheme 2, Staff ethnicity and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 3, Subtheme 1, Staff ethnicity	
Subtheme	Key Quotations
1 Staff ethnicity	<p>I1: Not necessarily, if they are familiar how the food is and how it should be served, then no.</p> <p>I1: about serving food I say it is fine, but I think it is also important to have Persian people working there. 'cause if a Persian person just could talk to them, I think that would be different... but that does not necessarily mean that all staff should be Persian.</p> <p>NI1: it is different so Persians will welcome you in their way in there like culture but if other workers would not reflect their culture.</p> <p>NI1: how they look and who are working there are Persian people or like European for example.</p> <p>NI1: yeah, you feel that you are in their country actually.</p> <p>I4: we went to the one Persian restaurant and because the waiter is I think Arabic people, person or something like that, we have to show him the English version of the food that we want, and it was a misleading because I said that I want the Shishlik, and they provide something about lambs. do not know what was that, and I object, you know, and he insisted that, OK, this is your order.</p> <p>I10: I think so. It is more authentic [if all the staff are Iranian], I think so that everything is exactly the same as what you had back Home</p>

Category 3, Theme 3, Subtheme 1, Staff ethnicity

Subtheme	Key Quotations
	<p>I2: To be honest, no. No, because I know everything of Persian food and that person is his or her work. Just take my order because I know everything, and I do not need ask question.</p> <p>NI5: So, the chef has to be Iranians. It would help.</p> <p>I2: but I think it is very important the person that cook the food. So, the chefs and everyone they should be Iranian. They should have knowledge. Of Persian food, for example. I am as Iranian if I decide to cook like pasta, I can cook pasta. I can follow some recipes. But this recipe is not coming from my heart. I cannot connect it with this recipe. And I think it is very important the person that cooked the food. Just feel that cooking. Feel that food, feel the ingredients. I think is very important.</p> <p>I3: It does not matter for me,</p> <p>I4: Yeah, it is very important for me, not for the Persian restaurant. I always say what the for example Japanese restaurant as well. Yeah. But if you have some people that are closest or to us if acceptable as well, like the Afghanistan people or Turkmans or Tajikistani people.</p> <p>I4: we went to the one Persian restaurant and because the waiter is I think Arabic people, person or something like that, we have to show him the English version of the food that we want, and it was a misleading because I said that I want the Shishlik And they provide something about lambs, do not know what was the kind of the food and I object, you know, and he insisted that, OK, this is your order.</p> <p>I5: It is OK. Yeah. Yeah. OK, that's OK. But, you know, I expect that the chef and head chef Iranian. Because the authenticity of the food.</p> <p>I6: Yeah, I think if they know the dishes, I do not mind the nationalities because also in Iran in the...Sometimes the people from Afghanistan work or Turkish people, but they need to know the food.</p> <p>I7: so definitely the people if there are from Iran. I would prefer that we welcomed by a Persian person in a Persian language. I walk to a Japanese restaurant, I prefer to see Japanese people or even Chinese [restaurant]. Everything you will go to there, to feel, to get the whole experience.</p> <p>I8: For me it does not matter, but I think one of the requirement of working in an ethnic restaurant. In Iranian restaurant is that they, they should be able to make connections and should understand the language to some extent</p> <p>NI10: I do not think they have to be necessarily, but I, but they tend to be so.</p> <p>NI2: Because people have to eat, people have to work. That does not matter. Really. No. Even the cook. It does not matter to me if the cook is from that location. Nothing. It does not matter.</p> <p>NI3: I think we need to remember that we're in London because in London again, everything's OK and everyone can serve you.</p> <p>NI4: I feel like the experience would be more authentic if the staff were Iranian only on the simple premise.</p> <p>NI4: yes, I would say that you're going to get a more. In the loosest term, authentic experience. If the if the staff is, if the staff is from that, from that culture.</p> <p>NI5: No, does not matter. Because you cannot always get Iranian stuff. Mm-hmm. You know, there could be British. There could be any nationality. Mm-hmm. You know, somebody looking for waitressing?</p> <p>NI9: Maybe even the staff might be from the country or know the culture so well that you cannot even tell that they are not.</p>

As discussed earlier in section 5.3.3.2, experiences of the restaurateurs demonstrated that their Iranian guests often place special emphasis on staff ethnicity, and they even shared some very negative experiences about how dissatisfied and frustrated their Iranian guests were in cases of being served by a non-Iranian member of staff. When diners were asked about their opinion regarding the ethnicity of the restaurant staff, a series of mixed responses were given.

A group of interviewees highlighted that the presence of Iranian staff members plays a significant role in elevating the restaurant's authenticity. For non-Iranian diners, being served by an Iranian individual brings a sense of authenticity by reflecting the culture and attaching them to the referent country (Iran). It also gives the guests the opportunity to experience the *true* Iranian hospitality.

NI1: Yeah, you feel that you are in their country actually.... it is different so Persians will welcome you in their way in there like culture but if other workers would not reflect their culture.

NI4: Yes, I would say that you're going to get a more. In the loosest term, authentic experience. If the if the staff is, if the staff is from that, from that culture.

Iranians emphasise that having Iranian staff meets their expectations of visiting an authentic Iranian restaurant. For them, it constructs the exact image of the dining experience they would encounter back in Iran (I10), however, it is also acceptable to see individuals of similar culture, language, or region.

I10: I think so. It is more authentic [if all the staff are Iranian], I think so that everything is exactly the same as what you had back home.

I4: Yeah, it is very important for me, not for the Persian restaurant. I always say what the for example Japanese restaurant as well. Yeah. But if you have some people that are closest or to us if acceptable as well, like the Afghanistan people or Turkmans or Tajikistani people.

However, similar to the findings of Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007), the other group of diners believe that the ethnicity of the staff, and in this case in a multicultural city like London (NI3), does not matter and should not be a factor in measuring authenticity. Some of the participants stated that Iranian staff members interacting with the guests could make a *difference*, but it does not mean that all staff members have to be Iranian (I1).

NI3: I think we need to remember that we're in London because in London again, everything's OK and everyone can serve you.

I1: about serving food I say it is fine, but I think it is also important to have Persian people working there. 'cause if a Persian person just could talk to them, I think that would be different... but that does not necessarily mean that all staff should be Persian.

I2: To be honest, no. No, because I know everything of Persian food and that person is his or her work. Just take my order because I know everything, and I do not need ask question.

Therefore, as long as the staff are well-equipped with the necessary skills for their job and possess adequate knowledge about the menu, their ethnicity becomes less consequential.

I1: Not necessarily, if they are familiar how the food is and how it should be served, then no.

While the primary focus of this research is on Front of House (FOH) staff¹⁷, some interviewees also expressed expectations regarding the ethnicity of Back of House (BOH) members, particularly chefs. Participant I2 emphasised the significance of the food *coming from the heart*; therefore, the authenticity of the food would be enhanced by having Iranian chefs. The belief is that having chefs from the same cultural background contributes to a more authentic representation of the provided

¹⁷ As FOH are usually the visually visible element of a restaurant (except for open/live kitchens)

cuisine, ensuring a genuine and heartfelt connection with the culinary traditions (Chatzopoulou, Gorton and Kuznesof, 2019).

I2: But I think it is very important the person that cook the food. So, the chefs and everyone they should be Iranian. They should have knowledge of Persian food. For example, I am as Iranian if I decide to cook like pasta, I can cook pasta. I can follow some recipes. But this recipe is not coming from my heart. I cannot connect it with this recipe. And I think it is very important the person that cooked the food. Just feel that cooking. Feel that food, feel the ingredients. I think is very important.

I5: It is OK. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. OK, that's OK. But, you know, I expect that the chef and head chef Iranian. Because the authenticity of the food.

NI5: So, the chef has to be Iranians. It would help.

6.5.3.2 Subtheme - Staff uniforms

Table 6.23 presents a summary of subtheme 3, Staff uniforms and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 3.

Table 6.23 A summary of Category 3, Theme 3, Subtheme 3, Staff uniforms and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 3, Subtheme 2 Staff Uniforms	
Subtheme	Key Quotations
2 Staff uniforms	<p>NI3: no, no, no. Of that being shown on in the decorations your traditional clothing because there have some memories of that it being quite different and original. Mm-hmm. And actually, good point. Maybe staff could wear. but I think that would help. Actually, for the authenticity idea.</p> <p>NI3: I am inclined to say yes, but that wouldn't, I think it wouldn't make. It would be very I do not think it would be bad if they would be very neutral.</p> <p>NI4: I couldn't imagine them wearing something incredibly specific because that does not seem to be the case from my experience.</p> <p>NI9: visually my perception would be strengthened, but overall, I do not think it is going to make or break my experience.</p>

Although uniforms with ethnic inspiration might have the potential to shape diners' perceptions, their overall significance and impact on the dining experience tend to be minimal. This is supported by studies from George (2001) on Chinese

restaurants and Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) on Thai restaurants, in which staff uniforms is not a contributing element to diners' perception of authenticity.

NI9: visually my perception would be strengthened, but overall, I do not think it is going to make or break my experience.

NI4: I couldn't imagine them wearing something incredibly specific because that does not seem to be the case from my experience.

NI3: no, no, no. Of that being shown on in the decorations your traditional clothing because there have some memories of that it being quite different and original. Mm-hmm. And actually, good point. Maybe staff could wear. but I think that would help. Actually, for the authenticity idea.

6.5.4 Theme 4 – What's on the menu

Theme 4, looks into the visual elements associated with the restaurant menu, encompassing aspects such as menu design, food names, available items on the menu, and the language used in the menu. A summary of the subthemes related to this theme can be found in Table 6.24.

Table 6.24 A summary of the Category 3, Theme 4, 'What's on the Menu' and its subthemes

No	Category 3, Visual Elements and Strategies	
	Theme	Subtheme
4	What's on the menu.	Menu design
		Call me by my name (and in my language)
		Hummus or no Hummus? That is the question (Food items)
		Menu language

6.5.4.1 Subtheme - Menu design

Table 6.25, presents a summary of subtheme 1, Menu design and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 4.

Table 6.25 A summary of Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 1, Menu design and its key quotations.

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 1, Menu design		
NO	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Menu design	<p>I1: Whenever I go to a restaurant, I do not really care about the menu [design]...</p> <p>I1: ...maybe it just unconsciously impacts me that I do not know so.</p> <p>NI1: when I pass through besides a restaurant even without reading the name, and just see the images of the menu I believe that it is a Persian. from the shapes of the images for how they look then I read I find that I was correct it is Persian because I get familiar now with Persian food.</p> <p>I10: for those people who are not from our culture, and it is their first time to just trying non-Persian people, it is better to have the picture of food with them.</p> <p>I2: The design is important. the pictures of in the menu [are] very important...If they want to put the like picture of food. In front of each line, you need. To put the exact food.</p> <p>NI3: I've seen some menus having visuals of how it looks like, how the meal looks like. Now. That being said, I think it should be high quality, though we've seen some news that are just, I do not know, self-made.</p> <p>I4: some places I saw that they provide demonstration for the food as a picture. It was good.</p> <p>I5: It is [pictures] important for non-Persian. Because I know what Ghormeh Sabzi is, but for them it is important.</p> <p>I7: I am not really picky with that, but if I want to look from both sides, I mean as an English person and as a Persian person, I would prefer to see some picture of the food, like to see how it will they present the food</p> <p>NI7: The menu I quite like when people have like pictures. Of the food... Maybe not me with authenticity because I do not know what things are supposed to look like anyway... I guess maybe for Persian people seeing like a picture of something that they are like, well, I know what that is without even having to read what it is, then that would be authentic if you could recognise it without needing like a description.</p>

Research has shown that different elements of the menu design such as the colour pallet, fonts, pictures, quality of the paper, weight, etc. can impact the perceptions of the guests (e.g. Magnini and Kim, 2016; Baiomy, Jones and Goode, 2019). Such elements affect the guests in more of an unconscious manner, which means that the customers are not actively aware of the impact and may not even acknowledge it till they are informed (I1).

I1: maybe it just unconsciously impacts me that I do not know so.

For the non-Iranian diners, with the previous experience of visiting Iranian restaurants and being familiar with the food options, the design alone, can help them tell if a restaurant is Iranian or not.

NI1: When I pass through besides a restaurant even without reading the name, and just see the images of the menu I believe that it is a Persian. from the shapes of the images for how they look then I read I find that I was correct it is Persian because I get familiar now with Persian food.

The design of the menu does not seem to be something which Iranian diners are concerned with very directly. This could be rooted in the fact that visiting an Iranian restaurant is not a novel experience for them, and their sole intention could be to have a meal. And since they are familiar with the food items, the menu is viewed as a list of options rather than exploring the unknown.

I1: Whenever I go to a restaurant, I do not really care about the menu [design].

Another visual element regarding the menu design is the inclusion of food images. Interestingly, both Iranian and non-Iranian diners assert that it does not influence their perception of authenticity; however, simultaneously, they both believe that it can be a significant factor for the other group.

I10: for those people who are not from our culture, and it is their first time to just trying non-Persian people, it is better to have the picture of food with them.

I5: It is [pictures] important for non-Persian. Because I know what Ghormeh Sabzi is, but for them it is important.

NI7: The menu I quite like when people have like pictures. Of the food... Maybe not me with authenticity because I do not know what things are supposed to look like anyway.... I guess maybe for Persian people seeing like a picture of something that they are like, well, I know what that is without even having to read what it is, then that would be authentic if you could recognise it without needing like a description.

According to the interviewees, a critical factor in incorporating food images on the menu is the assurance of high-quality images and their accurate representation of the meals served. This ensures that diners' expectations align seamlessly with the actual presentation of the food, fostering transparency and trust in the dining experience.

I2: The design is important. the pictures of in the menu [are] very important...If they want to put the like picture of food. In front of each line, you need. To put the exact food.

NI3: I've seen some menus having visuals of how it looks like, how the meal looks like. Now. That being said, I think it should be high quality, though we've seen some news that are just, I do not know, self-made.

6.5.4.2 Subtheme – Call me by my name (and in my language)

Table 6.26 presents a summary of subtheme 2, Call me by my name (and in my language), and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 4.

Table 6.26 A summary of Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 2, Call me by my name (and it my language), and its key quotations

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 2, Call me by my name (and in my language)		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	Call me by my name (and in my language)	<p>I1: As a Persian person I would say I want to see a Ghormeh Sabzi, not Persian Herb Stew.</p> <p>I1: Maybe they can write in little letters below it, what the food consists of what, what it is made with....</p> <p>NI1: most of them put in the menu Persian like Persian dish. Sometimes describe it like it is a Persian Shishlik. so, you feel that the name Persian that it is there original. So, it reflects for me originality from that space.</p> <p>NI1: to feel that it is more original maybe the word Persian before the name gives me more than its will be something specific in their country.</p> <p>NI1: the word Persian reflects that this is special food for this country.</p> <p>NI1: I do not mind that the name would be in Persian so I memorise the name in their language but to understand what is this strange name for me I need a description about it so when the description come English like for example chicken breast and roasted whatever I can understand...</p> <p>NI1: Not mind, both will be the same for me.</p>

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 2, Call me by my name (and in my language)	
No	Key Quotations
	<p>I10: I say we should keep the same thing because Ghormeh Sabzi... because it is a specific name.</p> <p>I10: So basically, it is like my name means Sky. It is like when I am coming here. I ask my friends, do not call me Sama call me sky. Example you know, so Sky. It is mine like a meaning of my name, but it is not my name. So, it is like. You are skipping the. The main thing. So, Sky is not Sama. Sama means the sky, but if you call someone a sky, it is not me anymore.</p> <p>I2: Because sometimes in the English menu. They try to translate everything, and I am as a Persian, confused. What's that mean for example? I can remember we went to the Persian restaurant. The menu is. In English and in the started there is something like noodle soup and I am noodle soup. Yeah, I am a. Do not have noodle soup in Persian, and I asked the waiter, and he told me it is so confusing.</p> <p>I2: I think for foreigner is really important ingredients.</p> <p>I3: It is so interesting even for me as Iranian to see what's the ingredients after each food.</p> <p>I4: I expect that I see...the original one. They also provide some a definition; you know in definition for the food. But I think they just they primary you think about the English people because even in the Persian statement they provided as a you know some ingredients based but we cannot see like this in our country ...and it is very strange.</p> <p>I6: But uh, it is exactly the same with Japanese food. You do not know what Teriyaki is, but they write everywhere. So, it is exactly the same thing with Ghormeh Sabzi. Why should we change the name?!</p> <p>I7: No, no, no. [not] Persian herbs stew, no. Come on, please. We're not gonna change the food's name! even I do not understand what we what is it?</p> <p>I8: Because we have, I think we can have lots of Persian herb stews. It is general.</p> <p>I9: But this if. You try to translate it, it takes away. You know, maybe the authenticity. That [Ghormeh Sabzi] at least the name is the same, and then if the if does not make sense with them. They can ask you. Know what's in there or if. You can provide this [Persian Herb stew] with the smaller fonts.</p> <p>NI10: Number one [Ghormeh Sabzi]. Yeah, I'd love it. I'll ask what that is and then I'll know what the name of the dish is. I do not want the English version [Persian herb stew]</p> <p>NI2: If it is written Persian, have it so I am also fine with it as long as it has the proper description of the items that I included or even like the way that it is cooked or prepared. They should have both written, because that way I can for example go to a different place and then OK, now I know what it is because sometimes people can tend to translate it in a different way</p> <p>NI2: So, if it has the original name than 100%, You'll think that is more authentic or more traditional.</p> <p>NI3: How descriptive it is would be quite crucial for someone who's come in and they would have no idea because sometimes I've been in situations where I would order something and all I get is a bowl of rice.</p>

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 2, Call me by my name (and in my language)		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
		<p>NI3: This will make no difference for me authenticity if this helps. Me. You have no idea what this. Means I do not think it will make it is the ultimate. Meal, I'd say.</p> <p>NI4: to save some level of time I would prefer it if it was written Ghormeh Sabzi I am never gonna be able to say that. I am just gonna work for that day, but perhaps then, like small in brackets, I would almost give a description of it rather than I wouldn't say Persian herbs stew. I would maybe say. A Stew rich in blah, blah, blah blah blah. So, it describes what you're actually going to eat.</p> <p>NI3: I guess it is like at the very least, like there is no reason not to call it that. Like take pride in language. Take pride in your food, it would seem strange to go. We're making this, but we're going to call it that, so.</p> <p>NI3: there are certain translations which kind of probably have a. Degrade, degradation or degradation effect on like the food. Like you know if you said Persian herb Stew for all I know the chef might be there and be like that's really offensive. It is so much more than</p> <p>NI5: I think for an Iranian, obviously that [Ghormeh Sabzi] is more authentic, but I am not. So, if I was walking into an Iranian, I would need that underneath.</p> <p>NI6: Because that's how it is called. I think this this I think this [Ghormeh Sabzi] is more authentic</p>

The following example (Figure 6.4) was given to the interviewees to have a clear understanding of what is meant when addressing food names. They were also informed that all three examples refer to one dish.

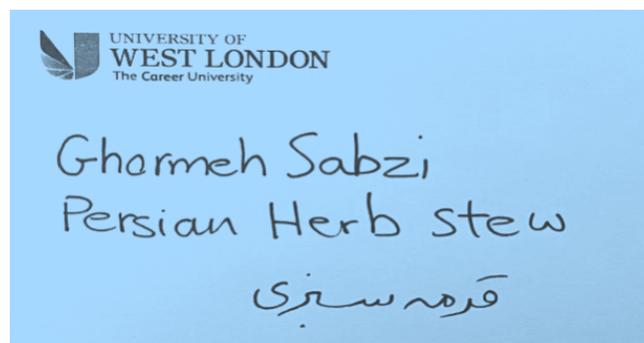


Figure 6.4 Example of an Iranian dish written in Fingilish, Farsi and as a description.

Iranian diners prefer the original food name (in this case, Ghormeh Sabzi) without any modifications and find it unacceptable to change the name completely. However, they do not mind the other version (in this case: Persian Herb Stew) provided as a description for the original name.

I1: As a Persian person I would say I want to see a Ghormeh Sabzi, not Persian Herb Stew.

I7: No, no, no. [not] Persian herbs stew, no. Come on, please. We're not gonna change the food's name! even I do not understand what we what is it?

I1: Maybe they can write in little letters below it, what the food consists of what, what it is made with.

According to participant I10, the main reason for this is that food names, just like human names, are generally specific and original, therefore changing the name to the translation would take away from their reality (I10). Therefore, while the literal translation can be correct, it is not a true representation of the dish and does not communicate its authenticity (NI3 & I9). Considering this, it can be stated that the choice of a name for a dish goes beyond mere identification; it serves as a cultural and linguistic marker that contributes to the overall authenticity of the culinary encounter.

I10: So basically, it is like my name means Sky. It is like when I am coming here. I ask my friends, do not call me Sama call me sky. Example you know, so Sky. It is mine like a meaning of my name, but it is not my name. So, it is like. You are skipping the main thing. So, Sky is not Sama. Sama means the sky, but if you call someone a sky, it is not me anymore.

NI3: there are certain translations which kind of probably have a. Degrade, degradation or degradation effect on like the food. Like you know if you said Persian herb Stew for all I know the chef might be there and be like that's really offensive. It is so much more than (that).

I9: But this if. You try to translate it, it takes away. You know, maybe the authenticity. That [Ghormeh Sabzi] at least the name is the same, and then if the if does not make sense with them. They can ask you. Know what's in there or if. You can provide this [Persian Herb stew] with the smaller fonts.

Another participant mentioned the example of "Teriyaki", highlighting that although the translation of the term is seldom provided, it is widely used in Japanese

restaurants. This underscores the idea that the key might be the consistent use of original names to familiarise individuals with the terminology rather than altering the names. This approach aims to educate diners about the authentic names of dishes, promoting cultural awareness and understanding without resorting to literal translations.

I6: But uh, it is exactly the same with Japanese food. You do not know what Teriyaki is, but they write everywhere. So, it is exactly the same thing with Ghormeh Sabzi. Why should we change the name?!

NI3: I guess it is like at the very least, like there is no reason not to call it that. Like take pride in language. Take pride in your food, it would seem strange to go. We're making this, but we're going to call it that!

Offering literal translations of menu items may lead to confusion among diners. This arises from the fact that direct translations may not convey the true essence or composition of the dish, potentially leaving diners uncertain about what to expect (I2). As an example, in Iranian cuisine, there are various versions of 'Herb stew' and this general name can not specify which of these dishes is going to be served (I8).

I2: Because sometimes in the English menu. They try to translate everything, and I am as a Persian, confused. What's that mean for example? I can remember we went to the Persian restaurant. The menu is. In English and in the started there is something like noodle soup and I am noodle soup?? Yeah, (we) do not have noodle soup in Persian, and I asked the waiter, and he told me... it is so confusing.

I8: Because we have, I think we can have lots of Persian herb stews. It is general.

When it comes to the non-Iranians' perception, there are mixed opinions. For some diners, food names do not appear to have a significant impact. A subset of this group expresses a preference for seeing the original name of the food on the menu solely to facilitate ordering the same dish across different restaurants (NI2).

Additionally, they emphasise a preference for detailed descriptions of the food that outline the ingredients of the dish, enabling a more informed and confident ordering experience (NI4).

NI2: If it is written Persian, have it so I am also fine with it as long as it has the proper description of the items that I included or even like the way that it is cooked or prepared. They should have both written, because that way I can for example go to a different place and then OK, now I know what it is because sometimes people can tend to translate it in a different way.

NI4: to save some level of time I would prefer it if it was written Ghormeh Sabzi I am never gonna be able to say that. I am just gonna work for that day, but perhaps then, like small in brackets, I would almost give a description of it rather than I wouldn't say Persian herbs stew. I would maybe say. A Stew rich in blah, blah, blah blah blah. So, it describes what you're actually going to eat.

Conversely, another group of non-Iranian diners, place a significant emphasis on the use of original food names on the menu. They argue that such a practice holds an important role in influencing their perception of authenticity when dining at an ethnic restaurant.

NI10: Number one [Ghormeh Sabzi]. Yeah, I'd love it. I'll ask what that is and then I'll know what the name of the dish is. I do not want the English version [Persian herb stew] I wanna know what I am ordering. Like, what's the name? How do you call it?

NI2: So, if it has the original name than 100%, You'll think that is more authentic or more traditional.

NI6: Because that's how it is called. I think this this I think this [Ghormeh Sabzi] is more authentic.

While presenting the original name or providing a description of the dish may not make a significant difference for non-Iranians, it is interesting to note that the use of the word "Persian" preceding the description of the food can evoke a sense of authenticity for the guest. This implies that guests may have varied perceptions

regarding the originality of the dish and the restaurant based on whether they see "Persian Herb Stew" or simply "Herb Stew" on the menu.

NI1: To feel that it is more original maybe the word Persian before the name gives me more than its will be something specific in their country.... most of them put in the menu Persian like Persian dish. Sometimes describe it like it is a Persian Shishlik. so, you feel that the name Persian that it is there original. So, it reflects for me originality from that space.... the word Persian reflects that this is special food for this country.

6.5.4.3 Subtheme – Hummus or no Hummus, that is the question

Table 6.27, presents a summary of subtheme 3, Hummus or no Hummus? That is the question and its key quotations related to Category 3, Theme 4.

Table 6.27 A summary of Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 3, Hummus, or no Hummus, that is the question

No	Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 3 Hummus, or no Hummus, that is the question	
	Subtheme	Key Quotations
3	Hummus or no Hummus? That is the question	<p>NI1: I will not take burger from Italian person so for it is if I want to try something from Persian, I need their original food.... I will only order from this restaurant original food because I went there to try this experiment to try Persian food not alternatives or something I get used to taste or to eat [at] other places.... you can say like we can provide many countries food it is okay but to name this name Persian... like Persian food and it is not Persian, it is not the genuine.... they can decorate the restaurants and you play the Persian music but the food like burgers and and other things... it will not be the original Persian.</p> <p>I7: Definitely traditional food from Iran. I am not going to that place to see pasta and pizza and all this stuff.</p> <p>NI5: I think if you're going to go to an Iranian restaurant, you want to eat Iranian food.</p> <p>I6: What kind of Iranian restaurant it is? I've never seen an Iranian restaurant that has a pizza or burger. And Hummus, I think even in Iran, sometimes they put it on the table now. But no, I do not want it because it is not Iranian.</p> <p>I2: non-Persian item shouldn't be in the menu. OK, sample like Hummus. Hummus is not for Persians. No, but you can find in all Persian restaurants in London as a starter.</p> <p>NI3: I would think that that's special type of Persian Pizza Caesar salad. [and if not] I would be surprised and think that right, well, this is just actual salad, but I could get in every other place and maybe cheaper so. I wouldn't be pleased. Because that's not what I've come in.... so, this might not help the authenticity.</p> <p>NI4: The one thing I say I look at in advance of going to a place if I've never been before is have a very brief look at their menu, and if I was to see that, that would turn me off more than necessarily anything else.</p>

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 3 Hummus, or no Hummus, that is the question		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
		<p>NI5: I think it is easier in a way to have things like burgers or whatever that before. But if I see something on the menu, this will put me off. I won't go. (I will go) somewhere else.</p> <p>NI9: I can taste my home food whenever. Yeah, I cannot taste Iranian food all the time.</p> <p>NI4: if I am there to a restaurant the main purpose is to experience the food. Therefore, if they are serving me sushi, it might be amazing sushi, but I'd be like I could have gotten sushi, a Japanese place. I've come specifically to you. So, you give me something I haven't had. Before, that's very traditional or specific to your culture, like that's why I am at that restaurant more than anything else.... I feel like that be quite a strong choice from the place itself and be like our aim here is not to be, uh to serve authentic Iranian food. Our aim here is to make money as a business and get bums on seats and kind of tailor for everyone.... our aim as an establishment is not to be authentic or give you as much access to authentic food.</p> <p>NI1: ... the main meals they offered from their traditional food.... we use it as a side effect [dish] with the grilled meat and other things so he would not say about hummus, it is Persian hummus...he will say if it is side dishes like hummus blah blah...</p> <p>I1: ...because it wouldn't count as the main food. it could be served with it though.... so as long as the main items are Persian that would be fine.... That [having non-Iranian food] would be also good, because this really gives flexibility.</p> <p>I9: Yeah. So, probably they are providing it because they have customers if so. Having extra stuff. Does not harm. No. It does not reduce my perception of [authenticity]. But not having the ones. That I expect to see, then, that that reduces.</p> <p>I3: This is good. Because when you go with family, for example, if I am going with my family. My nephew did. Do not like some of the Iranian foods because they were born here.</p> <p>I5: Yeah, this is OK too, because I think it is a variety of food is important. My son, he prefers to eat some fast food, some burgers, you know. So, it is good. It is good to have both together there.</p> <p>I4: I prefer that they just provide the provide them in another page for example, they said that this is the international or I do not know.</p> <p>I7: I really do not mind it [Hummus] because it is kinda close to our culture. It is still from the same area but would prefer that they kind of separated the say yeah, these are the traditional food, and these are our international food out say, but not in the menu that says that Persian traditional food and Hummus.</p>

When it comes to food items, diners' expectations of what should and should not be on the menu seem to be bifold. On one hand, there are diners who link the type of food served to the overall authenticity of the dining experience, and on the other

hand, there are those who are not significantly bothered with seeing non-ethnic items on the menu.

The first perspective looks at food as the centre of the dining experience, and no matter how authentic the other elements of the restaurant (decoration, music, etc.) are, if the food does not align with them, the whole experience would be perceived as inauthentic (NI1). These diners visit ethnic Iranian restaurants to experience the food and the culture, so they expect to see and be served such food only.

NI1: I will not take burger from Italian person so for it is if I want to try something from Persian, I need their original food.... I will only order from this restaurant original food because I went there to try this experiment to try Persian food not alternatives or something I get used to taste or to eat [at] other places.... you can say like we can provide many countries food it is okay but to name this name Persian... like Persian food and it is not Persian, it is not the genuine.... they can decorate the restaurants and you play the Persian music but the food like burgers and and other things... it will not be the original Persian.

I7: Definitely traditional food from Iran. I am not going to that place to see pasta and pizza and all this stuff.

NI5: I think if you're going to go to an Iranian restaurant, you want to eat Iranian food.

Therefore, neither Western food (e.g. pasta or pizza), nor regional food which is not originally from Iran (e.g. Hummus), is welcomed on the menu of Iranian restaurants (I6 & I2). If such items are offered, diners would assume that they are made with an Iranian take or twist, and anything other than that can cause disappointment and will negatively impact the authenticity (NI3).

I6: What kind of Iranian restaurant it is? I've never seen an Iranian restaurant that has a pizza or burger. And Hummus, I think even in Iran, sometimes they put it on the table now. But no, I do not want it because it is not Iranian.

I2: non-Persian item shouldn't be in the menu. OK, sample like Hummus. Hummus is not for Persians. No, but you can find in all Persian restaurants in London as a starter.

NI3: I would think that that's special type of Persian Pizza Caesar salad. [and if not] I would be surprised and think that right, well, this is just actual salad, but I could get in every other place and maybe cheaper so. I wouldn't be pleased. Because that's not what I've come in.... so, this might not help the authenticity.

The negative impact of seeing non-Iranian food on the menu can also be extended to discouraging diners from even visiting the restaurant, and not letting the dining experience happen in the first place.

NI4: The one thing I say I look at in advance of going to a place if I've never been before is have a very brief look at their menu, and if I was to see that, that would turn me off more than necessarily anything else.

NI5: I think it is easier in a way to have things like burgers or whatever that before. But if I see something on the menu, this will put me off. I won't go. (I will go) somewhere else.

Non-Iranian diners do not even welcome the idea of seeing their national dishes on the menu and believe although familiar, trying such food items can detract from the authenticity of the whole experience. The other negative impact of serving non-ethnic items is that such practice can be perceived as an opportunistic attempt to offer a generic menu to solely make money.

NI9: I can taste my home food whenever. Yeah, I cannot taste Iranian food all the time.

NI4: if I am there to a restaurant the main purpose is to experience the food. Therefore, if they are serving me sushi, it might be amazing sushi, but I'd be like I could have gotten sushi, a Japanese place. I've come specifically to you. So, you give me something I haven't had. Before, that's very traditional or specific to your culture, like that's why I am at that restaurant more than anything else.... I feel like that be quite a strong choice from the place itself and be like our aim here is not to be, uh to serve authentic Iranian food. Our aim here is to make money as a business and get bums on seats and kind of tailor for everyone.... our aim as an establishment is not to be authentic or give you as much access to authentic food.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, there are also several opposite views, justifying the presence of non-ethnic menu items for different reasons.

When referring to food, the first group mainly focus on the main dishes. Meaning that having pizza or pasta (non-Iranian items) on the menu is a red flag, but they would not mind seeing the options of Caesar salad or Hummus (both non-Iranian items) as side dishes.

NI1: ... the main meals they offered from their traditional food.... we use it as a side effect [dish] with the grilled meat and other things so he would not say about hummus, it is Persian hummus...he will say if it is side dishes like hummus blah blah...

I1: ...because it wouldn't count as the main food. it could be served with it though.... so as long as the main items are Persian that would be fine.... That [having non-Iranian food] would be also good, because this really gives flexibility.

Other situations in which diners are unconcerned with the presence of non-Iranian menu items arise when they can find the specific Iranian dishes they desire and consequently disregard the other offerings. Another example of this situation is when diners are accompanied by young children who have food preferences, as the availability of items such as fast foods can facilitate a more pleasant and less stressful dining experience.

I9: Yeah. So, probably they are providing it because they have customers if so. Having extra stuff. Does not harm. No. it Does not reduce my perception of [authenticity]. But not having the ones. That I expect to see, then, that that reduces.

I3: This is good. Because when you go with family, for example, if I am going with my family. My nephew did. Do not like some of the Iranian foods because they were born here.

I5: Yeah, this is OK too, because I think it is a variety of food is important. My son, he prefers to eat some fast food, some burgers, you know. So, it is good. It is good to have both together there.

A strategy proposed by some diners to maintain the authenticity of the restaurant while accommodating non-Iranian dishes is to offer both Iranian and non-Iranian dishes on the menu, clearly separating and labelling them. They believe this

approach caters to a broader range of preferences, ensuring that diners with varied perspectives and expectations have a pleasant dining experience.

I4: I prefer that they just provide the provide them in another page for example, they said that this is the international or I do not know.

I7: I really do not mind it [Hummus] because it is kinda close to our culture. It is still from the same area but would prefer that they kind of separated the say yeah, these are the traditional food, and these are our international food out say, but not in the menu that says that Persian traditional food and Hummus.

6.5.4.4 Subtheme – Menu language

Table 6.28 presents a summary of subtheme 4, Menu Language, and its key quotations.

Table 6.28 A summary of Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 4, Menu language and its key quotations

No	Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 4, Menu language	
	Subtheme	Key Quotations
4	Menu language	I1: And if they are Persian, it also feel them good, that's they are in London. Everything is English... reading English, but they also see something written in Persian. So, I think it makes both non-Persian and Persian people feel good about it.
		NI3: just looking visually at it, I think it is just beautiful. I think this would add to the authenticity. I think it does help with authenticity. In terms of it brings one home. This is how you write at home. This is your language; I think visually it is striking and good.
		I1: If you're talking about London, they should... Yeah, they have to be written in English. But also, I think including the Persian.... written in Persian just under that.
		NI1: The menus written in their own language but that description it could be in English so guests can understand what is this to order.
		NI9: I like the menus where there is the original language and then even underneath that they put the English or the translation for the customer. That's being authentic, but also catering to their demographic.
		NI2: with both languages, it means they cater to both people. So, it is made, it makes it more authentic in a way. It makes it feel a bit more enticing, especially on the menu as well, because you know that people that visit this place, they come from that background, and they chose to go there.
		NI6: I think about that probably if Iranian people are going there, that's actually good because then it means that they serve the food that they actually eating. For you, that's what it will mean for me. That's what that. But I won't say it is more than you know. I'll just think about, yeah. So, if they are coming, probably that's why it is in their language as well, but if they are. Coming that means it is a good place.
		NI5: if half the menu was in Farsi and the other half was in English, then I would know that Iranians would come and be able to read it.... And you can trust them more in that case.

Category 3, Theme 4, Subtheme 4, Menu language		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
		<p>NI3: This is how you write at home. This is your language; I think visually it is striking and good.... I think one could be even allowed to charge yourself higher. A bit in order to, because that means they need to educate the staff to how it is.</p> <p>I4: My suggestion is that OK you because we have a different type of the start of when I go to that restaurant, I just open the book in a right side. I should see the Persian one. If they want to order, they normally open the book in the left side so they can see the English side.</p> <p>NI4: Like if I always have to look it in reverse, I guess if I was to go to a. If I was in Italy. And I happen to walk past somewhere. That said, traditional English pub and I went in. And the menu had no English on it. Yeah, I would find that slightly strange. I wouldn't. I wouldn't be offended because I am, I mean Italy. You know, I like. Well, that makes sense. I am in Italy. Everyone here, everyone here speaks like I should learn Italian. But I would find it strange because I'd be like, that's an interesting way to sell your restaurant, given that you haven't done this.</p> <p>NI4: If I am going to a Persian restaurant, I would expect the menu to be in Persian. Same that if I was seeing. A Persian film. I would expect to watch that film with subtitles. I would not expect to watch a Persian film have it overdubbed with English, so they see their mouths moving at a very different rate to the English words. I would not expect that, because that to me seems. I am not sure why you would make that choice like you know this is a. This is a Persian movie. Persian people are going to want to watch this. Film like. Why would you not have it in Persian and then curtail the other way around? ... By changing it to English, you might be drastically taking away from what actually it is</p>

When living in an English-speaking country, where everyday life is in a language other than the mother tongue, the pleasant sense of attachment to *home* can come from the least expected places such the menu of an Iranian restaurant being written in Farsi language.

I1: And if they are Persian, it also feel them good, that's they are in London. Everything is English... reading English, but they also see something written in Persian. So, I think it makes both non-Persian and Persian people feel good about it.

The sense of attachment is not only limited to Iranian diners, and non-Iranian diners can also experience a different sense of attachment. For the Iranian guests, it would be being attached to the known and for the non-Iranians it can be being attached to the unknow, which can be equally pleasant.

NI3: just looking visually at it, I think it is just beautiful. I think this would add to the authenticity. I think it does help with authenticity. In terms of it brings one home. This is how you write at home. This is your language; I think visually it is striking and good.

The one rule that should be followed regardless of the ethnicity of the diners, is the necessity of providing English descriptions in the menu so all customers can effectively understand it and confidently choose their food (I1 & NI1). This strategy would not only maintain the authenticity, but also would ensure catering to a wider demographic (NI9).

I1: If you're talking about London, they should... Yeah, they have to be written in English. But also, I think including the Persian.... written in Persian just under that.

NI1: The menus written in their own language but that description it could be in English so guests can understand what is this to order.

NI9: I like the menus where there is the original language and then even underneath that they put the English or the translation for the customer. That's being authentic, but also catering to their demographic.

Seeing both languages on the menu can also be an indicator of ethnic people dining in the place, which is a positive sign for non-Iranian diners. It can enhance the non-Iranian diners' confidence in the restaurant, their perception of the food quality and even authenticity, as it is assumed that ethnic people are unlikely to visit a restaurant if it is otherwise.

NI2: with both languages, it means they cater to both people. So, it is made, it makes it more authentic in a way. It makes it feel a bit more enticing, especially on the menu as well, because you know that people that visit this place, they come from that background, and they chose to go there.

NI6: I think about that probably if Iranian people are going there, that's actually good because then it means that they serve the food that they actually eating. For you, that's what it will mean for me. That's what that. But I won't say it is more than you know. I'll just think about, yeah. So, if they are coming, probably that's why it is in their language as well, but if they are. Coming that means it is a good place.

NI5: if half the menu was in Farsi and the other half was in English, then I would know that Iranians would come and be able to read it.... And you can trust them more in that case.

Similar to the presence of ethnic food preparation tools such as Tanoor and Manghal (see section 5.3.2), the inclusion of the Farsi language on the menu can justify a premium price for the service. This is based on the requirement for restaurants to offer additional training, ensuring that their (non-Iranian) staff are confident in accommodating and serving diners who choose to use the Farsi menu.

NI3: This is how you write at home. This is your language; I think visually it is striking and good.... I think one could be even allowed to charge yourself higher. A bit in order to, because that means they need to educate the staff to how it is

Just like the strategy proposed by the diners earlier when discussing the menu items (see 6.5.4.3), they also suggest that restaurants can take advantage of the two languages being written in different directions¹⁸, and divide the menu into two sections.

I4: My suggestion is that OK you because we have a different type of the start of when I go to that restaurant, I just open the book in a right side. I should see the Persian one. If they want to order, they normally open the book in the left side so they can see the English side.

An interesting example is shared by diner NI4, describing a similar situation in a different country. While it is understandable that countries have their specific local language, if a specific restaurant advertises itself as 'authentic', it would be surprising and even strange, if the ethnic language is not used.

NI4: Like if I always have to look it in reverse, I guess if I was to go to a. If I was in Italy. And I happen to walk past somewhere. That said, traditional English pub and I went in. And the menu had no English on it. Yeah, I would find that slightly strange. I wouldn't. I wouldn't be offended because I am, I mean Italy. You know, I like. Well, that makes sense. I am in Italy. Everyone here, everyone here speaks like I should learn Italian. But I would find it strange because I'd be like, that's an interesting way to sell your restaurant, given that you haven't done this.

¹⁸ Farsi language is written from right to left, opposite to the English language, which is written from left to right, therefore books open from opposite sides.

Diner NI4 continue with another example and compares the strangeness of encountering a fully English menu to visiting the cinema to watch an Iranian movie and instead being offered a movie overdubbed in English. It is believed that such experiences can negatively impact the restaurant's authenticity

NI4: If I am going to a Persian restaurant, I would expect the menu to be in Persian. Same that if I was seeing. A Persian film. I would expect to watch that film with subtitles. I would not expect to watch a Persian film have it overdubbed with English, so they see their mouths moving at a very different rate to the English words. I would not expect that, because that to me seems. I am not sure why you would make that choice like you know this is a. This is a Persian movie. Persian people are going to want to watch this. Film like. Why would you not have it in Persian and then curtail the other way around? ... By changing it to English, you might be drastically taking away from what actually it is

6.5.5 Theme 5 – What’s on the table

The following section investigates the visual elements of the tableware, food presentation and food portion and how they influence the diners’ perception of authenticity. Table 6.29 provides a summary of the identified subthemes and the relevant key quotations for this theme.

Table 6.29 A summary of Category 3, Theme 5, 'What's on the Table' and its subthemes

No	Category3, Theme 5, What’s on the Table	
	Theme	Subtheme
5	What’s on the table	Chini e Zarrin ¹⁹ چینی زرین
		The more (rice), the merrier
		Food presentation

6.5.5.1 Subtheme – Chini e Zarrin (چینی زرین)

Diners’ opinions and expectations of the tableware in Iranian ethnic restaurants are discussed in this section. A summary of the subtheme and its key quotations are presented in Table 6.30.

Table 6.30 A summary of Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 1, Tableware and Serveware (Chini e Zarrin) and

¹⁹ A famous brand of Iranian China (porcelain) tableware

Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 1, Chini e Zarrin (چینی زرین)		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Tableware and Serveware (Chini e Zarrin)	<p>I4: For example, when we went to one Cafe, we saw about the kettle [Teapot] that came from the Toos Chini [brand] Yeah, and it was very, very, very fantastic for us. And I think in that moment we forgot about the cost because we feel that, yeah, yeah, maybe it works in that way...</p> <p>I9: definitely it will make the difference. It definitely will make a difference. Even the plates, if they have some sort of you know, painting. or something that... Iranian painting that would be lovely.</p> <p>NI1: With a special cup with this character for their culture [excited].</p> <p>I4: for example, in Iran, we eat the food with the spoon. But some sometimes I just I should ask for the spoon, and they forgot about that.</p> <p>I5: There is no difference between, you know, any porcelain.</p>

Generally, the design and colours of the tableware seemed to be the factors that most of the diners paid attention to.

I4: For example, when we went to one Cafe, we saw about the kettle [Teapot] that came from the Toos Chini [brand] Yeah, and it was very, very, very fantastic for us. And I think in that moment we forgot about the cost because we feel that, yeah, yeah, maybe it works in that way...

I9: definitely it will make the difference. It definitely will make a difference. Even the plates, if they have some sort of you know, painting. or something that... Iranian painting that would be lovely.

NI1: With a special cup with this character for their culture [excited].

It is important to note that the authenticity of a restaurant is not solely reliant on the visual aspects of serveware and cutlery, and the selection and choice of these items also play a crucial role. In Iran, food is typically consumed using a fork and spoon, a practice that differs from the use of a fork and knife in Western countries. Even in Iranian ethnic restaurants located outside of the country, diners anticipate adherence to these cultural norms regarding cutlery. The absence of such practices has the potential to impact their perception of authenticity (I4).

I4: for example, in Iran, we eat the food with the spoon. But some sometimes I just I should ask for the spoon, and they forgot about that.

To conclude this section, it is important to point out the few instances where tableware is solely counted as the ‘carrier’ of the food, with no extra involvement in the dining experience.

I5: There is no difference between, you know, any porcelain.

6.5.5.2 Subtheme – The more (rice), the merrier

This subtheme discusses the importance and impact of food portions on diners’ perception of authenticity. A summary of the subtheme and its key quotations is presented in Table 6.31.

Table 6.31 A summary of Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 2 The more (rice), the merrier

Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 2 The more (rice), the merrier	
No	Key Quotations
2	<p>The more (rice), the merrier</p> <p>I3: The rice is so important for us.</p> <p>I8: I think it is. It is in our culture, actually feeding well, feeding when we are invited in our grandparents’ houses, you know that they actually they want to feed their grandchildren as much as possible.</p> <p>I5: The food portion of the food actually is really important for me. Portion of the rice and the portion of the main food. It is really important for me.</p> <p>I9: portion size should be respectable</p> <p>I1: I would say the portion should be just like the portions that are served in restaurants that are already in Iran. So, in large portions [laughs].</p> <p>I7: so back home, the food portions are really big. They are really big and they can fit up to three people and you kinda expect the same, but you know that you are in London and that’s a different place</p> <p>I8: normally Iranian appreciate a larger portion of food and in some restaurants, uh actually do this and actually they draws lots of people’s attention from other countries as well.</p> <p>NI10: I feel like if it is an authentic restaurant sometimes, like I do not know I, but maybe it is just the way I think about it because I come from a culture where food is really important. Then like you know, if you if you get a lot of food, then that’s it is a good thing. It is a sign that it is a really, you know, they treat the guests really nicely.</p> <p>NI1: the size of the meal and how much they put beside it, I think it does not reflect it is genuine or not... no, no, I do not think it relates to originality... what it come with this food and actually I believe that most of restaurants can measure how much the meal will be for one person, so it should be like something suitable.</p> <p>I10: I think again this should be in two ways. Like ideally, if they have like Iranian customers, they ask them like because I know that British people, they do not eat a lot like lots of rice, even rice. So, they can ask that we have an Iranian portion.</p>

Serving generous portions of Kabab, Khoresht (²⁰خورشت - stew) and, most importantly, Chelo (²¹چلو - rice) -whether it is in households to in restaurants- is believed to be an integral part of the Iranian culinary culture and a symbol of love and respect (see section 2.5).

I3: The rice is so important for us.

I8: I think it is. It is in our culture, actually feeding well, feeding when we are invited in our grandparents' houses, you know that they actually they want to feed their grandchildren as much as possible.

There are certain expectations in regard to food portion for diners. Iranians emphasise the importance of the food portion for them (I5) and stress that the portions offered in Iranian ethnic restaurants should be “respectable” (I9) and comparable to the quantities typically served in Iran (I1).

I5: The food portion of the food actually is really important for me. Portion of the rice and the portion of the main food. It is really important for me.

I9: portion size should be respectable

I1: I would say the portion should be just like the portions that are served in restaurants that are already in Iran. So, in large portions [laughs].

Nevertheless, some of the Iranian individuals acknowledge and find it understandable that in ethnic restaurants, adjustments to food portions might be necessary to align with market demand and standards.

I7: so back home, the food portions are really big. They are really big and they can fit up to three people and you kinda expect the same, but you know that you are in London and that's a different place.

²⁰ /xɔ:reʃt/

²¹ /'tʃɛlou/

They believe that one of the reasons for individuals from other nationalities to be attracted to Iranian restaurants can be the large portions, resulting in a perception of higher value for money.

I8: normally Iranian appreciate a larger portion of food and in some restaurants, uh actually do this and actually they draws lots of people's attention from other countries as well.

For non-Iranian diners, unless they come from a similar cultural background and/or geographical region (NI10), food portions do not appear as a significant element and do not contribute to their perception of authenticity. Their perspective centres around the belief that as long as a standard portion, suitable for an individual, is served, other considerations regarding portion size hold little importance (NI1). This highlights a contrast in cultural expectations, with non-Iranian diners placing less emphasis on the quantity of food as a determining factor in their dining experience and authenticity perception.

NI10: I feel like if it is an authentic restaurant sometimes, like I do not know I, but maybe it is just the way I think about it because I come from a culture where food is really important. Then like you know, if you if you get a lot of food, then that's it is a good thing. It is a sign that it is a really, you know, they treat the guests really nicely.

NI1: the size of the meal and how much they put beside it, I think it does not reflect it is genuine or not.... no, no, I do not think it relates to originality... what it come with this food and actually I believe that most of restaurants can measure how much the meal will be for one person, so it should be like something suitable.

A potential solution to address expectations regarding food portions is a practice that is already implemented in some Iranian restaurants in London. It involves serving a standard portion of rice and providing additional rice at no extra charge for those who desire or are accustomed to a larger serving. This approach caters

to diverse preferences while maintaining a balance between cultural expectations and practical considerations in the restaurant setting.

I10: I think again this should be in two ways. Like ideally, if they have like Iranian customers, they ask them like because I know that British people, they do not eat a lot like lots of rice, even rice. So, they can ask that we have an Iranian portion.

The added opportunity in this practice is to showcase the hospitality culture of Iran and the tradition of offering free food items to the guests as a sign of Mehman Navazi - *مهمان نوازی*. Sections 2.5 and 6.4.1 present more information about Mehman Navazi.

6.5.5.3 Subtheme – Food Presentation

The current subtheme explores diners’ opinions and expectations related to the presentation of the food served in Iranian ethnic restaurants. A summary of the subtheme and its key quotations are presented in Table 6.32.

Table 6.32 A summary of Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 3 Food Presentation

Category 3, Theme 5, Subtheme 3 Food Presentation		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
3	Food presentation	<p>N11: I tried it in different... three different Persian restaurants they presented the same way, so I believe that okay... that it is their origin way how they presented... like Koobideh, come with Naan bread or with rice and the side dishes are known what is it. so, when the shape of the food, the dish come with these things you feel that it is a traditional or authenticity or the genuine shape of presenting this meal.</p> <p>I10: It's [moulded rice] not bad, it's fine. I've tried it and it's not bad, but when you have that dome of [rice]. Yeah, I'm not eating that much. But when you're seeing that it's exactly reminds you of house.</p> <p>I6: ...sometimes they put also the salad inside. I think no... should be separated like just like Iran.</p> <p>I2: For me, the presentation is directly connected to the place that I go.... I think in some point this presentation [moulded rice] is good...Although it's not like original presentation of Chelo Kabab. No. OK. It's nice like because it looks good.... I think it depends on the restaurant and the place. If you have a very modern restaurant.... the presentation should be more than... and this restaurant presents themselves in this way, you can't just serve your food like an old-fashioned kind of way in Iran.</p> <p>I7: And it does, and it doesn't interfere with authenticity. I don't think so. Even in Iran, they're doing the same. I mean the fancy restaurants in in Iran, there are, there are really working on you, how they present the food, and they just don't bring the food as it is</p>

As mentioned earlier in the chapter (section 6.3.1.3), for non-Iranian diners, one of the ways to judge the authenticity of their dining experience is by comparing and contrasting it with their previous experiences of going to an ethnic Iranian restaurant. The same rule applies to the presentation of the food served. It means that when in several stances the food presentation was something specific, the individual would assume that it is the authentic way and would be able to tell the difference between an Iranian dish and food from another country.

NI1: I tried it in different... three different Persian restaurants they presented the same way, so I believe that okay... that it is their origin way how they presented. like Koobideh, come with Naan bread or with rice and the side dishes are known what is it. so, when the shape of the food, the dish come with these things you feel that it is a traditional or authenticity or the genuine shape of presenting this meal.

It appears that although modern presentation ideas (such as moulded rice) are not entirely dismissed by Iranian diners, the preference for classic food presentations is mainly rooted in the nostalgia evoked by dishes similar to those from their home (I10). Despite this openness to new ideas, it is also believed that there should be a minimum adherence to the original presentation (I6).

I10: It's [moulded rice] not bad, it's fine. I've tried it and it's not bad, but when you have that dome of [rice]. Yeah, I'm not eating that much. But when you're seeing that it's exactly reminds you of house.

I6: ...sometimes they put also the salad inside. I think no... should be separated like just like Iran.

There is also a perspective suggesting that as long as the presentation aligns with the type of the restaurant (e.g. casual, fine dining, etc.), variations in the presentation are not only acceptable but also expected (I2 & I7).

I2: For me, the presentation is directly connected to the place that I go.... I think in some point this presentation [moulded rice] is good...Although it's not like original presentation of Chelo Kabab. No. OK. It's nice like because it looks good.... I think it depends on the

restaurant and the place. If you have a very modern restaurant... the presentation should be more than... and this restaurant presents themselves in this way, you can't just serve your food like an old-fashioned kind of way in Iran.

I7: And it does, and it doesn't interfere with authenticity. I don't think so. Even in Iran, they're doing the same. I mean the fancy restaurants in Iran, there are, there are really working on you, how they present the food, and they just don't bring the food as it is.

6.6 Category 4 Auditory Elements and Strategies (Diners)

The fourth category is dedicated to the elements and strategies which are linked to the sense of audition. A summary of the themes, and the key quotations related to category 4 – auditory elements and strategies (diners) - can be found in Table 6.33.

Table 6.33 Summary of category 4 auditory elements and strategies (Diners), its themes, and the key quotations

Category 4, Auditory Elements and Strategies		
No	Theme	Subtheme
1	The Magic of Music	Shajarian, Bach or Beyonce?
		Pop, Loud and Sad
2	Spoken Language	N/A

6.6.1 Theme 1 – The magic of Music

Theme 1, 'The Magic of Music', is divided into two distinct subthemes. The first subtheme examines the influence of music on diners' perceptions of authenticity and investigates their expectations when dining at an Iranian ethnic restaurant. The second subtheme presents some interesting findings of diners' opinions towards the genre, volume, and emotional tone of the music.

A summary of the key quotations related to each subtheme is presented at the beginning of each section.

6.6.1.1 Subtheme - Shajarian²², Bach or Beyonce?

The first subtheme investigates diners' perceptions and opinions towards hearing Iranian or non-Iranian music and how it influences their perception of authenticity.

A summary of the subtheme and the key quotations is presented in Table 6.34.

Table 6.34 A summary of the key quotations related to Category 4, Theme 1, Subtheme 1, Shajarian, Bach or Beyonce?

Category 4, Theme 1, Subtheme 1 Shajarian, Bach or Beyonce?		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Shajarian, Bach or Beyonce?	<p>NI5: I think if you have Persian music. It adds to the whole experience of sort of new, you know, different food, new food.</p> <p>NI1: I do not understand the words the lyrics, but I feel that the music holds you to their original culture.</p> <p>I1: well, in my opinion it is more authentic, feels more authentic to me. Again, it does not mean that that restaurant is authentic or not. You know most of that is just to the food they serve and the hospitality in the restaurant. But for me when I hear the Persian, the traditional music. I would feel that that restaurant is more authentic.</p> <p>I10: it helps. It is again reminds you of home.</p> <p>NI3: What we need to remember is Iranians coming into Persian restaurant. Would also have that additional sense of home if they hear the music, that Iranian music. There. OK, I think why I mentioned the Latin perspective every time me coming into Latvian restaurant reminds me of the Latin music and bringing me a bit more back home.</p> <p>I7: I would definitely prefer to hear something in Persian</p> <p>NI3: I am very. Much hoping it is very Persian. And it has. I would like it to be a mix between instrumental music and sang music especially sang... Example pops in my mind I am in Latvian restaurant here in London. Every time I go there it is just Latvian.</p> <p>I9: They have decided to come there. So, I would understand it if I go to a Polish restaurant, to a Greek restaurant they are playing their own music.</p> <p>NI2: That that is not good. Because it breaks. It is an experience, right? Mm-hmm. If I am if I am stepping out of my house to go somewhere to eat, especially if I choose a traditional restaurant. Hmm. I want to experience the whole package.</p> <p>NI7: I hope like Persian music... I feel like it would create like an environment that like matched. Everything else. That if Beyoncé was playing, it would just feel really. Out of place.</p> <p>NI8: I prefer the music from the country... I just I do not feel not so comfortable because it (non-Iranian music) does not match.</p> <p>NI9: And sometimes I think it can maybe draw away from the authentic picture they are trying to create.</p> <p>I6: if I want to listen to Beyoncé or whatever I go [to places with play that] to yeah, I am going to Iranian restaurant to get that Iranian feeling... I do not want to listen to English music.</p>

²² Mohammadreza Shajarian (1940 – 2020), Maestro of Iranian classical/traditional music.

I7: It should be a Persian because there are many, many other places that have you that can that you can hear Beyoncé in other restaurants. So, if you want to, you can go to other places, yeah.

NI7: But it would be weird to me to hear a song that I was. Familiar with hmm.

NI2: I do not like. I do not want to listen to Lady Gaga pop music. I want to listen to their traditional because it kind of compliments [the whole experience].

I10: only. Like Persian music. You know it. It is like when you are going to McDonald's and you. That Shajarian is. Playing how you feel, it is weird. Very weird. So, it is the same

NI1: if that restaurant may put Arabic music because most of his guest Arabic so to welcome them sometime, some kind of hospitality to play their songs so they feel that they are in their country. so, I may appreciate that this Persian restaurant will put Arabic songs. that I feel that he respects me so he play it for my sake not in general... but if he put in general and all of his song will be Arabic not Persian it will not give me that it is Persian, I would think that it is an Arabic restaurant that who have some Persian food.

NI3: I would then think that they have done it on purpose, knowing that there is Latin customer in and making it more want more personal experience. But I would say more like a note. That should be. Why it is hard to define because well, I guess. In a way, going into Persian restaurant, I am running away from the past, not running away, but wanting something different from the usual.

In the context of restaurants, particularly within the context of ethnic Iranian establishments, while food undoubtedly takes centre stage, the significance of music as a felt and enjoyed element should not be underestimated. Music functions as an invisible adhesive, seamlessly connecting all the sensory elements and playing a crucial role in creating a cohesive and immersive dining experience. Its harmonisation with the overall atmosphere is the key to creating a holistic experience.

NI5: I think if you have Persian music. It adds to the whole experience of sort of new, you know, different food, new food.

Moreover, the impact of music extends beyond sheer enjoyment; it holds the power to shape one's perception of authenticity. This influence occurs independently of the listener's comprehension of the language in which the music is presented. Music's emotive qualities, ability to evoke emotions, and capacity to establish a cultural ambience can contribute significantly to the overall authenticity of the dining experience.

NI1: I do not understand the words the lyrics, but I feel that the music holds you to their original culture.

I1: well, in my opinion it is more authentic, feels more authentic to me. Again, it does not mean that that restaurant is authentic or not. You know most of that is just to the food they serve and the hospitality in the restaurant. But for me when I hear the Persian, the traditional music. I would feel that that restaurant is more authentic.

When diners hear a piece of music which is linked to their background and roots, it has the transformative power to transport them back home and instil a profound sense of attachment. The nostalgic melodies serve as a channel, connecting individuals with the familiar sounds of their cultural heritage, creating an emotional resonance that goes beyond the immediate dining environment.

I10: it helps... It is again reminds you of home.

NI3: What we need to remember is Iranians coming into Persian restaurant. Would also have that additional sense of home if they hear the music, that Iranian music. There. OK, I think why I mentioned the Latin perspective every time me coming into Latvian restaurant reminds me of the Latin music and bringing me a bit more back home.

However, when diners visit Iranian ethnic restaurants, regardless of their own ethnicity, there is a shared expectation to hear Iranian music (I7 & NI3). This anticipation aligns with a broader cultural norm observed in various ethnic restaurants, where the music of the respective countries is considered an integral part of the dining experience, contributing to the restaurant's ambience (NI3 & NI7).

I7: I would definitely prefer to hear something in Persian.

NI3: I am very much hoping it is very Persian. And it has. I would like it to be a mix between instrumental music and sang music especially sang... Example pops in my mind I am in Latvian restaurant here in London. Every time I go there it is just Latvian.

I9: They have decided to come here. So, I would understand it. If I go to a Polish restaurant, to a Greek restaurant they are playing their own music.

To explore the expectations of diners regarding the music, they were presented with scenarios in which music from famous non-Iranian artists and musicians, including Beyonce, Lady Gaga, and Beethoven, is played in Iranian ethnic restaurants. The consensus among diners was that the inclusion of such music would "break" the overall experience (NI2), feels "out of place" (NI7), causes a level of discomfort (NI8), and potentially diminishes the restaurant's authenticity (NI9).

NI2: That is not good. Because it breaks. It is an experience, right? Mm-hmm. If I am if I am stepping out of my house to go somewhere to eat, especially if I choose a traditional restaurant. Hmm. I want to experience the whole package.

NI7: I hope like Persian music....I feel like it would create like an environment that like matched everything else. That if Beyoncé was playing, it would just feel really out of place.

NI8: I prefer the music from the country... I just I do not feel...not so comfortable because it does not match.

NI9: And sometimes I think it can maybe draw away from the authentic picture they are trying to create.

Furthermore, when diners choose to visit an ethnic restaurant, their usual intention is to immerse themselves in a complete cultural experience (I6). In this context, if guests specifically desire non-Iranian music, they will typically opt for alternative types of restaurants (I7). Particularly for non-Iranian diners, hearing a familiar piece of music in an Iranian restaurant could seem peculiar, as the establishment is intended to represent a distinct culture and ethnicity (NI7). The expectation is that the auditory ambience should align with the cultural immersion sought by diners in such establishments (NI2).

I6: if I want to listen to Beyoncé or whatever I go [to places with play that] to yeah, I am going to Iranian restaurant to get that Iranian feeling.... I do not want to listen to English music.

I7: It should be a Persian because there are many, many other places that have you that can that you can hear Beyoncé in other restaurants. So, if you want to, you can go to other places, yeah.

NI7: But it would be weird to me to hear a song that I was familiar with
hmm.

NI2: I do not like. I do not want to listen to Lady Gaga pop music. I want to listen to their traditional because it kind of compliments [the whole experience].

A thought-provoking example to clarify this point was shared by Participant I10, where the example of Shajarian being played in a McDonald's restaurant was given. The fact that it would be an unusual and "weird" choice and would not suit the environment and the business model of the fast-food outlet.

I10: Only like Persian music. You know it...It is like when you are going to McDonald's and you [hear] that Shajarian is playing how you feel, it is weird. Very weird. So, it is the same.

To further clarify the point regarding the opinion of non-Iranian diners being exposed to music from their own language, the interviewees were asked how they would feel if such music were played in an ethnic Iranian restaurant. The answers revealed some interesting points. Participant NI1, whose mother tongue was Arabic, shared that as long as the presence of non-Iranian music (in this case Arabic) is temporary and as a sign of hospitality and respect, it would have a positive impact. However, if non-Iranian music is the only option, then it is a sign of the restaurant not being authentic.

NI1: if that restaurant may put Arabic music because most of his guest Arabic so to welcome them sometime, some kind of hospitality to play their songs so they feel that they are in their country. So, I may appreciate that this Persian restaurant will put Arabic songs. that I feel that he respect me so he play it for my sake not in general... but if he put in general and all of his song will be Arabic not Persian it will not give me that it is Persian, I would think that it is an Arabic restaurant that who have some Persian food.

But not all non-Iranian diners feel the same about being treated to music from their background. While they would appreciate the act, for them visiting an ethnic restaurant is to experience a new environment including but not limited to the food, decoration, music, etc. and they do not want to be exposed to what they usually experience.

NI3: I would then think that they have done it on purpose, knowing that there is Latin customer in and making it more want more personal experience. But...I guess in a way, going into Persian restaurant, I am running away from the past, not running away, but wanting something different from the usual.

6.6.1.1 Subtheme - Pop, Loud and Sad

In the second subtheme diners' opinions and experiences of listening to different genres of music, various emotional tones (e.g. sad, happy, etc.) and pleasantness of low and loud music are explored. A summary of the subtheme and its key quotations is available in Table 6.35.

Table 6.35 A summary of the key quotations related to Category 4, Theme 1, Subtheme 2, Pop, Loud and Sad

Category 4, Theme 1, Subtheme 2 Pop, Loud and Sad		
No	Subtheme	Key Quotations
1	Pop, Loud and Sad	<p>I6: some of the restaurants you go, and they play the Persian music from 30 years ago, I do not want that, you know, is definitely even though it is Persian music, you want to listen to; to be authentic, you want it to be what is played now in restaurants in Iran.</p> <p>NI4: I almost do not mind what you're playing as long as it is not too loud. I. Cannot stand restaurants to. Play music too loud cause like I am ultimately there to chat with the people I am with and enjoy. The food. So, you know, if I was to go into an Iranian restaurant and they were playing I do not know could be anything Italian music. My first thing would be more. Is this too loud? This is if it is not too loud. I almost do not mind what it is.</p> <p>I3: I went to restaurant, Irani restaurant they play so sad songs and I feel so bad and I really, I didn't really enjoy after food and the food was so good, but the music was so sad.</p> <p>NI3: they play only instruments instead of singing, which is going to be understandable for all the people. They just really enjoy.</p>

In the preceding subtheme, the preferences, and expectations of diners regarding the auditory experience of Iranian versus non-Iranian music were examined. Expanding further on this topic, it was found that Iranian diners, being more familiar with ethnic music, also expressed their preferences for specific music genres. For

some, an authentic dining experience entails listening to “what is played now in restaurants in Iran,” referring to more contemporary music, as opposed to older music. It is interesting to observe that while ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ are typically used interchangeably by the interviewees (see section 6.3.2), when it comes to music, hearing a piece “from 30 years ago” can lead diners to question the authenticity of their experiences.

I6: some of the restaurants you go, and they play the Persian music from 30 years ago, I do not want that, you know, is definitely even though it is Persian music, you want to listen to; to be authentic, you want it to be what is played now in restaurants in Iran.

Another auditory factor that diners find important, is the volume of the music played. While the volume does not seem to directly link to their perception of authenticity, it seems to be a factor that influences the dining experience significantly.

Interviewee NI4 emphasises the importance of music volume over its language, stating a tolerance for different types of music as long as it is not played too loudly. The diner highlights that high-volume music can disrupt the dining experience, emphasising a preference for a quieter environment that allows for easy conversation and social interaction.

NI4: I almost do not mind what you're playing as long as it is not too loud. I. Cannot stand restaurants to. Play music too loud cause like I am ultimately there to chat with the people I am with and enjoy the food. So, you know, if I was to go into an Iranian restaurant and they were playing I do not know could be anything Italian music. My first thing would be more. Is this too loud? This is if it is not too loud. I almost do not mind what it is.

The emotional impact of music selection can deeply influence the dining experience. For example, interviewee I3 recounted dining at an ethnic Iranian

restaurant where, despite enjoying the food's quality, their overall enjoyment was diminished by the presence of sad songs. This observation highlights the critical importance of aligning musical choices with the desired dining ambience to optimise diners' satisfaction.

I3: I went to restaurant... Irani restaurant they play so sad songs and I feel so bad and I really, I didn't really enjoy after food and the food was so good, but the music was so sad.

Given the intricate role of music and its influence on the dining experience, instrumental music can often be considered a safe option. This is because it does not necessitate any particular linguistic proficiency, allowing diners of various backgrounds to appreciate it regardless.

NI3: they play only instruments instead of singing, which is going to be understandable for all the people. They just really enjoy.

6.6.2 Theme 2 – Spoken Language

The spoken language within ethnic restaurants and the role that it plays in forming diners' perception of authenticity is discussed in Theme 2. A summary of the key quotations is presented in Table 6.36.

Table 6.36 A summary of Category 4, Theme 2, Language spoken and pronunciation, and its key quotations

No	Category 4, Auditory Elements and Strategies		
	Theme	Subtheme	Key Quotations
2	Spoken Language	N/A	<p>I10: I think so. It is more authentic; I think so that everything is exactly the same as what you had back Home.</p> <p>I5: makes me feel at home, to communicate with somebody in Persian. It is good. It really feels me better.</p> <p>I9: 99% would be better if they are, so if they are speaking Farsi. Yeah, I have had experiences of going somewhere and started speaking Farsi, but the person did not do the same. It did not put me off. But obviously you know if the guy is Iranian, him or her and we can share a few jokes or something.... It is just a little bit of more better feeling I would. Say that make it more authentic.</p> <p>NI9: if they greet me in in Farsi and then in English or vice versa, that would be super cool like.</p> <p>I8: Not actually, because I know that it is another country. Hopefully in London we have lots of Iranians, but imagine in different parts of the world... I cannot imagine that I should have the expectations that</p>

everybody should be fluent, because I personally, although I am living in London and I speak English, I am not as fluent as many other people.

I6: They do not need to speak Farsi, they just need to know about that dish and maybe pronounce it, you know, because you know, when you go to the Iran the restaurant, you would like to say, OK, I want to eat Ghormeh Sabzi, you know? And then if the people person looks at you strangely... sometimes you experience like a waitress or a waiter that does not even know how to pronounce the food and that like kind of keeps me away from that restaurant. [but] I do not think it has to do with the authenticity of the food.

N11: I would like to hear other people language and how they speak and actually I appreciate that people keep talking to each other with their original language so it is like something like related to owner about your reality to your origins and but because we live in international country it is important to have an international language like English to know how to deal with me, otherwise we only will use the photos [laughs].

N12: It [staff speaking in Farsi] does not translate to [authenticity].

N17: I think it would be more to do with the food itself rather than. The waiting staff. Yeah, I do not think that would matter to me as much.

Diners from different backgrounds and ethnicities usually, welcome the idea of hearing the restaurants' staff, speaking in the Farsi language. For many Iranian diners being welcomed in their native language can be a sign of authenticity, reconstructing the experience that they would have "back home" (I10), and enhancing the pleasantness of their experience (I5).

I10: I think so. It is more authentic; I think so that everything is exactly the same as what you had back home

I5: Makes me feel at home, to communicate with somebody in Persian. It is good. It really feels me better.

For the dining experience to be more authentic, other than being able to converse in the Farsi language, it is also preferred that the interaction between diners and service providers is driven by warm discussions and even jokes (I9).

I9: 99% would be better if they are, so if they are speaking Farsi. Yeah, I have had experiences of going somewhere and started speaking Farsi, but the person did not do the same. It did not put me off. But obviously you know if the guy is Iranian, him or her and we can share a few jokes or something.... It is just a little bit of more better feeling I would. Say that make it more authentic.

Diners emphasise, that when discussing ethnic restaurants, it is important to acknowledge the global diversity and recognise that expecting fluent Farsi

everywhere, particularly outside cities with larger Iranian communities like London, is unrealistic.

I8: Not actually, because I know that it is another country. Hopefully in London we have lots of Iranians, but imagine in different parts of the world... I cannot imagine that I should have the expectations that everybody should be fluent, because I personally, although I am living in London and I speak English, I am not as fluent as many other people.

One of the Iranian diners (I6), points out that while staff fluency in Farsi is not essential, precise pronunciation of menu items holds significant importance. They highlight that mispronunciations can affect their decision to dine at a restaurant, although it does not necessarily reflect on the authenticity of the food served.

I6: They do not need to speak Farsi, they just need to know about that dish and maybe pronounce it, you know, because you know, when you go to the Iran the restaurant, you would like to say, OK, I want to eat Ghormeh Sabzi, you know? And then if the people person looks at you strangely... sometimes you experience like a waitress or a waiter that does not even know how to pronounce the food and that like kind of keeps me away from that restaurant. [but] I do not think it has to do with the authenticity of the food.

Looking at the non-Iranian's perspective, hearing the Farsi language being spoken in Iranian ethnic restaurants, is usually appreciated, and seen as a connection to the restaurant's roots. A creative option, suggested by one of the interviewees (NI9), is a bilingual greeting, which can be seen as a positive enhancement to the dining experience, suggesting that multilingual interactions contribute positively to the restaurant's atmosphere and authenticity through a sense of cultural immersion.

NI1: I would like to hear other people language and how they speak and actually I appreciate that people keep talking to each other with their original language, so it is like something like related to owner about your reality to your origins.

NI9: if they greet me in in Farsi and then in English or vice versa, that would be super cool like.

As pointed out above, hearing the Farsi language can be a pleasant thing for non-Iranian diners, however, it is important to point out that the ability to communicate with the guests in English is a necessity, and otherwise, the dining experience cannot be delivered to its full potential.

NI1: ...because we live in international country it is important to have an international language like English to know how to deal with me, otherwise we only will use the photos [laughs].

While some diners address the influence of language in creating an authentic dining experience, there are also perspectives that consider linguistic factors less critical. For instance, some diners, argue that staff speaking Farsi does not necessarily equate to authenticity (NI2), suggesting that other elements such as food, are more essential in fostering an authentic atmosphere (NI7).

NI2: It [staff speaking in Farsi] does not translate to [authenticity].

NI7: I think it would be more to do with the food itself rather than the waiting staff. Yeah, I do not think that would matter to me as much.

6.7 Category 5 Olfactory Elements and Strategies (Diners)

A summary of the subthemes, their categories and the key quotations related to theme 5 – olfactory elements and strategies (diners) - can be found in Table 6.37.

Table 6.37 Summary of category 5, olfactory elements and strategies (Diners), its themes, subthemes, and the key quotations related to it

Category 5: Olfactory elements and strategies		
No	Themes	Key quotations
1	Food aroma	<p>I10: So, after you walk into that that specific environment, the next thing that like draws my attention is. Kind of smells that I can feel.</p> <p>R: Is it only a smell of the Food?</p> <p>No, just everything that you can remind me of our home, you know. I mean, like the perfume or the sounds that they use the scent of the restaurant is something that draws you in inside or I do not know. The smell of food in the environment. There is something that really helps you to be convinced to go to that restaurant.</p> <p>I2: It is a very good, uh. I mean, it is like a winner element for that restaurant because this amazing smell of bread, you can they, it can catch your sense and maybe you in a sudden you think it does not pass you the sun here there over there and have a meal and but for me to be honest. It is not just about authentic and everything this, but it is a very winner element for level.</p> <p>I5: I love the smell. Of the fresh bread. So Tanoor feels really good</p> <p>The smell of the full smell of yeah, I really care about the smell. taste is important, actually. But before eating, I. Just I smell.</p> <p>NI2: You just walking around, but if you catch a scent, a nice scent if you are OK. I am. I am going to. I am going to yeah.</p> <p>NI4: it kind of gets you ready to eat, like mentally kind of prepping. OK, you know, I am going to enjoy this.</p> <p>NI1: when I feel... the smell of the tea, I feel that really this is Iranian or Persian food</p> <p>NI1: I will go directly to buy because it is like this the main thing that attracts me is that it smells is like that good smell from that point, so you feel that it gives you that the feeling of the place.</p> <p>NI1: I was walking in the street like in West Ealing, I feel the smell, I just move my head to read what was because this attracts me.</p>
		<p>I1: Those things are representative of culture, and it would definitely make me feel good, and I think that it would be interesting for other people from other countries to try. Because it would really familiarize them with the culture of a country...</p> <p>I8: I personally do not like, Esfand smell.</p> <p>I4: Yeah, it is a good option, but yeah, two things. The first often spend will be used normally in near of the Norouz, for example, or for ceremonial or for something a special, and the second one the smoke sometimes may bother others.</p> <p>I9: It is not essential to be there, so better not to have it. Might be Persian, but I wouldn't like it because I have difficulty with breathing so it is a personal preference, and it may make some people uncomfortable anyway so.</p>
2	Infused scent	

6.7.1 Theme 1 - Food aroma

The importance of the aroma of food in the dining experience is underscored by its ability to evoke a pleasant feeling and create a sensory connection between individuals and the source of the smell, in this case, the restaurant. Both non-Iranian and Iranian diners, as reflected in the statements from participants NI2 and I10, acknowledge that the enticing scent of the food serves as a compelling factor that attracts customers to the restaurant.

NI2: You just walking around, but if you catch a scent, a nice scent if you are OK. I am. I am going to. I am going to yeah.

I10: The smell of food in the environment. There is something that really helps you to be convinced to go to that restaurant.

This sensory element not only stimulates appetite but can also contribute to the overall perception of the restaurant and influences the decision-making process of potential diners.

NI5: I think if you can smell bread, it adds to your salivatory glands, anticipating how nice it is going to be. Yeah. Kebabs on charcoal.

Interestingly, the food aroma appears to have a limited impact on the general perception of authenticity. The olfactory experience becomes slightly significant when diners have prior experience of a specific item, and the aroma serves as a cue for them to assess the authenticity of that particular dish or, by extension, the overall authenticity of the restaurant. In this context, the aroma functions more as a trigger for memory and recognition, influencing diners' judgments about the genuineness of the culinary offerings. While the overall ambience and sensory elements, including food aroma, contribute to the dining experience, their role in

shaping perceptions of authenticity seems to be more context-dependent, and tied to the familiarity of individual dishes.

NI1: When I feel...the smell of the tea, I feel that really this is Iranian or Persian food.

6.7.2 Theme 2 - Infused scents

Smelling unique -non-food- scents like Esfand²³ is one of the elements that can represent Iranian culture and bring a pleasant feeling to the diners. Below, participant I1 mentions that the scent of Esfand is a “representative of the culture”, and the word culture is one of the terms which the interviewees use quite frequently when addressing authenticity. Where the term ‘*culture*’ is followed by positive statements such as “make me feel good”, that good feeling can also potentially be linked with the perception of authenticity.

The distinctive fragrance of non-food scents, such as Esfand, can serve as an element that symbolises Iranian culture. Participant I1 highlights that the scent of Esfand is a “representative of the culture,”. The term ‘*culture*’ is frequently used by interviewees when discussing authenticity. When the term ‘*culture*’ is accompanied by positive sentiments, such as “makes me feel good”, the positive emotions evoked by these scents can be potentially linked to the perception of authenticity.

I1: Those things are representative of culture, and it would definitely make me feel good, and I think that it would be interesting for other people from other countries to try. Because it would really familiarise them with the culture of a country.

Despite the potentially positive influence of infused scents like Esfand, several diners conveyed personal disapproval of it (I8). They regarded such scents as

²³ A weed found in Persia and Central Asia, and the surrounding regions. When burned, it emits fragrant smoke. Burning Esfand is a tradition believed to ward off the evil-eye and negative energy (Omidssalar, 1998).

unnecessary elements, believing their presence could be more detrimental than beneficial to the overall dining experience (I9).

I8: I personally do not like Esfand smell.

I9: It is not essential to be there, so better not to have it. Might be Persian, but I wouldn't like it because I have difficulty with breathing so it is a personal preference, and it may make some people uncomfortable anyway so.

6.8 Category 6 Gustatory Elements and Strategies (Diners)

A summary of category 6, its themes and key quotations is below in Table 6.38.

Table 6.38 Summary of theme 6, gustatory elements and strategies (Diners), its subthemes, and the key quotations related to it

Category 6 - Gustatory elements and strategies		
No	Theme	Key quotations
1	Tastes like home	I4: in my opinion the texture and also the taste is more important than other aspects.
		I8: my own priority is actually tastes on top, on top of everyone.
		NI7: the most important thing would be the taste. Like everything else, I feel like is less important. It really is just like. Whether that food tastes like how it would taste if you went to that country and had it. That's just the most important one, I think.
		I1: About what they taste... I would definitely want the taste of again... this in my home in Iran. The food that the mom would make [smiles].
		I2: My grandma cooks authentic Persian. And when you go to the authentic Persian restaurant. The food should be like that, the taste, the look the balance. The spices and everything,
2	No parsley in my Koobideh	NI1: When I feel the taste of the saffron , I feel that really this is Iranian or Persian food....I judge the food. is it original or not.
		NI2: The food was good because the tastes are very similar to my to the cuisine in my home country. Very similar taste to kind of like Mediterranean way of cooking, especially with the kind of like The BBQs. Seasoning is very similar as well.
		I2: No, no, no, no, no, it is not. Acceptable. It is not. OK
		I7: No, definitely not [authentic].... I feel like I am in the wrong place. I feel like I need to go back to and learn how that cook, how to make this dish.
		I8: I am open-minded about experimenting new things and. Maybe it might fit well if it well for me, but it is not actually as original recipe or authentic as expected.
		NI8: Feel strange and but I think maybe I should try from the curiosity.

Category 6 - Gustatory elements and strategies		
No	Theme	Key quotations
3	Same recipe, different quality of the ingredients	<p>I1: That wouldn't make me feel good. Definitely feel bad [laughs].</p> <p>I2: to be honest, at the end I just we couldn't find any good anything Persian restaurant here. But it is not surprisingly because the ingredients is different</p> <p>I3: No, they are using the same recipe actually. They are using the same recipe, but the taste of the meat and the taste of the rice is different.</p> <p>I8: Maybe their ingredients, their fresh stuff might be different.</p> <p>I8: Most of us expect original recipes, so in terms of how they are conventional in terms of how they are, they can actually prepare food in at least country which is far away from Iran.</p> <p>NI1: I know that Persian people use saffron, so if they are not using it where's the originality in that? and actually, the most important part is their specific spices yeah you will not find Saffron in any other place other than Persian.</p>

6.8.1 Theme 1 – Tastes like home

It is long, that it has been established that food is one of the fundamental elements for human being's survival (Maslow, 1943) and some even go further by saying that it is the key to one's heart -regardless of their gender-. In the case of dining outside the home, food has always been one of the main priorities for diners. And while it has been established that dining in ethnic restaurants serves an extended purpose to food, it is still the centre of attention for some.

I4: in my opinion the texture and also the taste is more important than other aspects.

I8: my own priority is actually tastes on top, on top of everyone.

NI7: the most important thing would be the taste. Like everything else, I feel like is less important. It really is just like. Whether that food tastes like how it would taste if you went to that country and had it. That's just the most important one, I think.

When an individual lives far from the motherland, food and, in particular, how authentic the food tastes would become a way to make them feel at home and closer to their loved ones. In this case, the food is not limited to the taste buds anymore and serves an extended purpose to impact the overall experience.

I1: About what they taste... I would definitely want the taste of again... this in my home in Iran. The food that the mom would make [smiles].

I2: my grandma cooks authentic Persian. And when you go to the authentic Persian restaurant. The food should be like that, the taste, the look the balance. The spices and everything.

For non-Iranians who usually do not have an emotional attachment to Iranian food, it is either their previous experiences of Iranian food which would be the standard of judging if a food tastes authentic or not (also see Category 3, Theme 5 –) or if they would be able to trace a similarity between the food and similar kinds of cuisines (e.g. Turkish, Lebanese, Greek, etc.).

NI1: When I feel the taste of the saffron , I feel that really this is Iranian or Persian food....I judge the food. is it original or not.

NI2: The food was good because the tastes are very similar to my to the cuisine in my home country. Very similar taste to kind of like Mediterranean way of cooking, especially with the kind of like The BBQs. Seasoning is very similar as well.

6.8.2 Theme 2 – No Parsley in my Koobideh

Hudgins (2006) states a number of criteria that have to be met before any traditional dishes can be reproduced in other contexts: first, the same look, smell, and taste should be maintained using the right ingredients and cooking techniques.

To explore the importance of using the original ingredients in the recipe of the food offered in ethnic restaurants, interviewees were given the example of parsley being added to one of the most famous Iranian kababs, Koobideh²⁴, and were asked about their opinion. Most of the diners agreed that such practices are not acceptable (I2), and would deviate from the perceived authenticity (I7)

²⁴ The original recipe of Koobideh Kabab does not include any kinds of herbs and the most similar dish with the addition of herbs can be Adana Kabab from Turkey.

I2: No, no, no, no, no, it is not. Acceptable. It is not. OK

I7: No, definitely not [authentic]... I feel like I am in the wrong place. I feel like I need to go back to and learn how that cook, how to make this dish.

6.8.3 Theme 3 - Same recipe, different quality of the ingredients

The ingredients which should be used in the original recipes of different Iranian foods, are usually known by the Iranian individuals, and can be a measure for them to judge the authenticity of the dish and modifying the recipe can bring unpleasant feelings for them.

I1: That wouldn't make me feel good. Definitely feel bad [laughs].

However, Iranians residing outside of the country are aware that, at times, even if an exact recipe is followed, differences in the quality of the raw ingredients and the challenges concerning accessing authentic ingredients can significantly impact the final taste of the cooked meal.

I2: to be honest, at the end I just... we couldn't find any good anything Persian restaurant here. But it is not surprising because the ingredients is different.

I3: No, they are using the same recipe actually. They are using the same recipe, but the taste of the meat and the taste of the rice is different.

I8: Maybe their ingredients, their fresh stuff might be different.

For diners who are less familiar with the original recipes, the use of unique ingredients such as Saffron can be one of the factors which would enable them to tell if the food that is served for them meets the standards of Iranian food. It also can act as a unique element which cannot be found in many other cuisines and make the diners feel that they are having an original and authentic meal.

NI1: I know that Persian people use saffron, so if they are not using it where's the originality in that? ... and actually, the most important part is their specific spices yeah you will not find Saffron in any other place other than Persian.

6.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter begins by presenting the interviewees' demographic information, classifying them into Iranian and non-Iranian diners. Following this, the thematic analysis of the research findings is presented in six distinct categories.

First, diners' definitions and perceptions of authenticity are explored, their level of distinction between the terms 'authentic' and 'traditional' is explored and the significance they attribute to food is investigated. This is followed by the second category, investigating the impact of cultural practices and familiarity on diners' perception of authenticity, discussing concepts such as Mehman-Navazi and culturally specific payment methods. The next four categories looked into sensory elements including vision, audition, olfaction, and gustation.

The discussion of visual elements employs a macro-to-micro approach to depict the entire dining experience. It starts with the initial physical touchpoint of visiting a restaurant the exterior design, and progresses to finer details like interior design, staff, menu, and the food served.

Next, auditory elements, including music and spoken language are investigated. This is followed by category 5, exploring diners' opinions and perceptions towards food aroma and infused scents. The chapter concludes by examining various aspects of taste, including nostalgic perspectives, and the importance of authentic recipes and ingredients.

CHAPTER 7 Discussion: A Tale of Two Stakeholders

The current study investigated the impact of sensory elements on the creation of authenticity in ethnic Iranian restaurants in London. The existing literature (see CHAPTER 2 and CHAPTER 3) has primarily explored the concept of authenticity in dining environments using quantitative research methods and focusing largely on diners. This indicates a significant need for further qualitative studies (Tsai and Lu, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2013) and an examination of the opinions and perceptions of restaurateurs (Zeng, Go and, de Vries, 2012; Kim and Jang, 2016; Grayson and Martinec, 2004). To address these gaps, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with both diners and restaurateurs to gain a rich understanding through the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Quota sampling was employed in the selection of diners, to ensure equal representation of the viewpoints of Iranian and non-Iranian diners.

This chapter discusses the findings of the restaurants' observations and interviews with restaurateurs and diners, which were presented earlier in Table 4.2 and Chapters 5 and 6, triangulation is considered by comparing the findings and identifying the gaps between the opinions and experiences of these stakeholders. This study makes several contributions to the food business and hospitality literature, which are presented in the following sections, focusing on three different aspects. First the perception and definition of authenticity from the perspectives of both restaurateurs and diners, second the link between sensory elements, strategies and perceived authenticity, and finally the role of cultural practices in the provision of hospitality.

7.1 Stakeholders' perception and definition of authenticity in ethnic restaurants

Authenticity is widely acknowledged as a valuable and desirable concept across different businesses, physical environments, and branding (Lu, Chi and Liu, 2015; Schallehn, Burmann and Riley, 2014; Lu, Gursoy, and Lu, 2015). The existing literature is mainly focused on the impact of different factors such as food (e.g. Jang, Ha and Park, 2012) and atmospherics (e.g. Al-Kilani and El Hedhli, 2021) on the authenticity of dining settings. According to Englander (2019), in general, when exploring a concept or phenomenon, it is important to first learn about participants understanding, level of awareness, and knowledge about it, as it could impact their answers as well as inform the data analysis. Despite this importance, only a few studies have explored participants' definitions of the term authenticity (Kovács, Carroll and Lehman, 2014; Muñoz, Wood, and Solomon, 2006). To address this gap, the current research initiated the interviews by asking the participants about their understanding of authenticity. Interestingly, while both diners and restaurateurs initially found it challenging to put their definition of authenticity into words, the information presented throughout the interviews evidence that, except for a few objective examples (sections 6.3.1.2 and 5.2.1), overall the participants' perceptions of authenticity are predominantly shaped by a constructive approach to authenticity and both stakeholders believe that authenticity is largely regarded as a fluid concept that can be impacted by exposure to mass media and demographic factors and varies across individuals and contexts.

This is significant from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. Primarily, it is important for researchers to be transparent regarding their perspectives on

authenticity and to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' viewpoints, to ensure accurate study design and data collection and analysis since a blind interpretation and analysis of the responses can put the validity of the conclusion drawn at risk. Similarly, looking from a business perspective, in experiential industries such as food or tourism, where authenticity plays an important role, service providers must form an in-depth understanding of consumers' perception towards authenticity to align their business strategies with the expectations of their target market.

The next finding of the current research was revealed in discussions with Iranian participants conversing in Farsi (both diners and restaurateurs), as well as among a few non-Iranian diners, it has been observed that the terms 'authentic' and 'traditional' are frequently used interchangeably. Both diners and restaurateurs often do not strictly distinguish between these two terms. Despite the growing literature on authenticity in dining settings, only a few studies address this interchangeable use. For example, Abarca (2004, p.10) demonstrates this in analysing a poem about 'culinary authenticity', Fillitz and Saris (2012) discuss it from an anthropological perspective, and Kovács, Carroll and Lehman (2014) identify 'traditional' as a keyword describing 'authenticity'. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first to explore the interchangeable use of these terms and to challenge stakeholders to reflect on their word choices. Attention to the choices of these words not only helped the researcher to better understand the stakeholders' perspectives and stances towards authenticity but also clarified their perceptions and opinions about authenticity and the five senses (Table 6.9 and Section 6.3.2). This underscores the importance of considering

contextual, cultural, and linguistic factors when studying subjective concepts such as authenticity (Moriarty, 2015).

In line with the existing literature (Jang and Eves, 2019; Chen, Gau, and Wu, 2014; Sezgin, Tanrısevdi and Sezgin, 2023), the current research reveals that both restaurateurs and diners of different ethnicities believe that an authentic dining experience is equipped with transformational powers. Meaning that upon entering an authentic ethnic restaurant, diners should be immersed in either their nostalgic memories of 'home' (ethnic diners), or the fascinating 'unknown' (non-ethnic diners) which can be an indication of authenticity (Table 6.8 and Sections 6.3.1.5). This is well-supported by the literature on the significance of nostalgia in dining experiences (Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Chen, Huang, and Zhang, 2020), as well as current discussions about the 'power of the unknown' in the dining experiences of non-ethnic diners (Youn and Kim, 2018).

Previous literature has stated that consistency can serve as a tool in shaping perceptions of authenticity (Schallehn, Burmann and Riley, 2014), aiding diners, especially those from non-ethnic backgrounds, in forming expectations and establishing benchmarks through which they can evaluate and judge the authenticity of their dining experience. However, the findings of the interviews reveal a new and unique perspective by distinguishing between consistency and repetitive clichés. The current research stresses that although consistency can be used as a value-adding strategy, blind replication of conventional elements without evidence of strategical insights can paradoxically diminish the perceived authenticity of the dining experience, signalling staged authenticity instead (Sections 5.3.2.2 and 6.5.2.2).

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to authenticity in cultural and consumer studies by demonstrating that authenticity is not solely about maintaining consistency but also involves originality and meaningful contributions that reflect genuine cultural insights. Therefore, service providers are encouraged to move beyond replication of ethnic elements and instead design informed strategies that resonate with the cultural essence they aim to represent, so that not only their offerings are perceived as more genuine, but also the heightened perceived authenticity will enhance the value of the overall dining experience.

The next finding of this research is linked to the role of diners' backgrounds in their dining experience. Diners' ethnic backgrounds can influence their perceptions and expectations (e.g. Ebster and Guist, 2005; Kim and Jang, 2016), stating that ethnic identity shapes lifestyles and affects food choices, expectations and perceptions (Fischler, 1988; Hough, 2011; Timothy and Ron, 2013). Previously only two studies by Ebster and Guist (2005) and Song, Van Phan and Kim (2019), investigated the link between familiarity and perceived authenticity, and they both discovered that ethnic individuals tend to hold different standards when evaluating the authenticity of ethnic restaurants, as their knowledge of the specific culinary culture and recipes would often make them compare their dining experiences with the offerings back in their home country and/or the households and food that they grew up in. The current study contributes to the existing knowledge by adding another layer to it. It was found in the interviews that while ethnic diners hold authenticity as an important factor, it does not necessarily translate as the overall authenticity, and instead, they tend to be mainly concerned with 'food authenticity', unlike non-ethnic diners who find 'environment authenticity' (Jang, Ha and Park, 2012) as more

significant (Section 6.3.3). Possible reasons for this difference of priorities could be in the underlying motives for each group to visit ethnic restaurants. For non-ethnic diners with a low familiarity and experience the dining sessions can be more exploratory compared to ethnic diners who have more subtle experience. These findings underscore the importance for ethnic restaurants to accurately identify their target customers and adapt various elements to meet their specific expectations. By understanding and catering to these differing priorities, ethnic restaurants can enhance customer satisfaction and create more meaningful and authentic dining experiences for a diverse clientele.

A comparative summary of the research key findings linked to authenticity is presented below in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 A comparative summary of the research key findings linked to authenticity

Authenticity	Restaurateurs	Iranian Diners	Non-Iranian Diners
Definition of authenticity	Challenging to define	Challenging to define	Challenging to define
Perception of authenticity	Mainly Constructive	Mainly Constructive	Mainly Constructive
The transformational powers of an authentic experience	Both	Home	The unknown (Someone else's home)
'Authentic' vs 'traditional'	Interchangeable use	Interchangeable use	A few instances of interchangeable use
'Food authenticity' vs 'environment authenticity'	Both	Food authenticity	Environment authenticity

7.2 Sensory elements, strategies, and their impact on the perception of authenticity in ethnic restaurants

The following section discusses the key findings of the current research through a critical analysis of the sensory strategies implemented by restaurateurs to enhance

the authenticity of their restaurants (Objective 3), as well as analysing diners' perceptions and expectations regarding such practices (Objective 4). In the present research, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and visual elements were investigated. While diners and restaurateurs happen to agree on the overall positive impact of sensory factors on perceived authenticity, this study identified a number of discrepancies in the opinions and expectations of the two groups.

The use of ethnic language in various forms such as restaurant signage (Song and Yang, 2023; Magnini, Miller and Kim, 2011; Baker and Kim, 2018), music (Wen, Leung and Pongtornphurt, 2020), and menu language (Choi, Liu and Mattila, 2018; Kim and Baker, 2017) has been demonstrated to influence perceptions of authenticity in ethnic restaurants. The current research extends the existing knowledge (e.g. Song and Yang, 2023) by identifying strategies, related to the use of ethnic language in the signage, to influence diners' perception of authenticity (Sections 5.3.1.16.5.1). The findings of this study suggest that including the ethnic language (Farsi in this study) on restaurants' signage or indicating the restaurant's ethnic origin (e.g. Iranian restaurant, Korean restaurant, etc.) can positively affect diners' perception of authenticity. For ethnic diners, such elements build a positive sense of security and confidence, whereas for non-ethnic diners it incites curiosity about the restaurant. However, the existing literature overlooks the importance of ensuring that ethnic language is not the sole option displayed on the signage and the necessity of providing essential information (e.g. restaurant type) through the use of the local language. This oversight can present the restaurant as unwelcoming and less inviting to non-ethnic diners by signalling a negative sense

of exclusivity, thereby producing a counterproductive effect, which could potentially discourage them from visiting the restaurant (Section 6.5.1.2). The significance of these findings lies in their implications for restaurant management and marketing strategies. By strategically incorporating ethnic language on signage while ensuring a balance between it and local language, restaurants can enhance authenticity perceptions among both ethnic and non-ethnic diners, optimise their restaurants' appeal and sustain competitiveness.

Menu language and food names are complex elements that play a significant role in shaping the dining experience and the existing literature acknowledges their influence on perceived authenticity (e.g., Kim, Youn, and Rao, 2017). However, the current research, through a qualitative approach, uncovers three novel and detailed layers that further deepen our understanding of how these elements impact the perception of authenticity in ethnic restaurants.

Firstly, menus featuring ethnic languages and original food names are well-received by diners, evoking a sense of originality and authenticity regardless of their ethnic background, as supported by literature (e.g., Youn and Kim, 2017). Such menus can also be perceived by non-ethnic diners as indicative of ethnic individuals dining in the restaurant, suggesting a higher level of authenticity and quality. The current study builds upon the insights of Choi, Liu, and Matilla (2018), by identifying a gap in the literature regarding the importance of incorporating the local language as well as food descriptions in the menu, in order to facilitate decision-making and the ordering process (Sections 5.3.7.1, 5.3.7.2, 6.5.4.2, and

6.5.4.46.5.4.2). By highlighting these additional elements, this research broadens the understanding of how menu design influences authenticity perceptions in ethnic dining settings. These insights not only can serve as practical strategies for restaurateurs but also enhance theoretical discussions on cultural authenticity and consumer behaviour.

Secondly, While the importance of food descriptions is acknowledged by restaurateurs, they do not deem it necessary to include the ethnic language on menus, under the assumption that all diners can read the menu in the local language (Section 6.5.4.4). It is important to note that the current research is focused on London, an English-speaking city, and the English language is a global language (Crystal, 2003). Such assumptions of restaurateurs may not hold true for ethnic restaurants located in lesser-known local languages, particularly those with higher tourism rates. Therefore, it is important for restaurateurs to recognise the role of a menu beyond a simple list of offerings and utilise it strategically to communicate certain favourable messages.

The final finding regarding language use is related to food names. Previous studies have studied different elements of food names, such as sensory descriptive names (e.g. Satin Chocolate Pudding vs Chocolate Pudding) (Wansink, Van Ittersum and Painter, 2005), demonstrating the significant influence of food names on consumer behaviour, and their potential to be used as financially sound marketing strategies to communicate certain information to the target market. In the context of ethnic restaurants. While earlier research has confirmed the direct impact of ethnic elements on diners' perception of authenticity, there is limited research (e.g. Youn and Kim, 2017) on the link between food names and perceived authenticity. The

findings of the current research identify an agreement between the stakeholders against altering original food names. Such changes would not only detract from the authenticity of the dining experience but also create challenges for non-ethnic diners attempting to order the same item across different restaurants.

Regarding the presence of ethnic and non-ethnic food items and recipes on the menu, the findings of this research align with the existing body of literature, with a number of additional observations. Consistent with the current knowledge (Chatzopoulou, Gorton, and Kuznesof, 2019), it is evident that the presence of non-ethnic food items is neither highly welcomed by restaurateurs nor is interpreted as a positive sign by diners. However, there is a perspective that as long as non-ethnic dishes are not featured as main meals or are clearly separated from authentic items on the menu, the presence of non-ethnic side dishes can be overlooked, and typically justified by market demand. Overall, while including certain 'globalised' food items such as hummus or chips may appear as a profitable option for businesses, it is important to clearly label the non-ethnic food and to be transparent about how the restaurant is presented to the market (authentic or not). This approach ensures that diners' expectations are shaped accordingly, avoiding disappointment.

Continuing with the discussion on food, portion sizes, were also investigated in the current research, revealing distinct perspectives between restaurateurs and diners. The majority of the restaurateurs, influenced by the cultural norms of the Iranian hospitality (see section 2.5), tend to believe that serving larger portion sizes, can translate to authenticity and consequently leave a positive impact. However, this viewpoint, is only partially agreed by a few numbers of the ethnic

diners, while others reported that they as long as the portion sizes are reasonable, they are not particularly concerned about them. To the best knowledge of the author, it is the first time that food portions are directly discussed in regard to perceived authenticity, as previous literature mainly study this element with regard to elements such as general food quality (e.g. Liu and Jang, 2009).

The next area of the discussion is on auditory elements, including music, and spoken language. Despite extensive research on the role of music in dining settings (e.g. Silaban et al., 2023; Chao, Fu, and Liang, 2021; Wen, Leung, and Pongtornphurt, 2020), the existing literature has yet to investigate and compare diners' expectations with restaurateurs' opinions and perceptions, thereby neglecting the co-creative nature of a dining experience. The current research addresses this gap by shedding light on a notable inconsistency between diners' expectation and restaurateurs' actions and strategies in the use of ethnic music. Diners from various backgrounds generally appreciate hearing music from restaurants' countries of origin and cultural backgrounds. However, restaurateurs often underestimate the importance of this auditory element. Some restaurateurs even believe that playing music from their non-ethnic diners' backgrounds would demonstrate respect and hospitality. Contrary to this belief, diners tend to find such practices strange and unpleasant, as it disrupts their overall dining experience (Section 6.6.1). This finding holds significance as it underscores the potential disconnect between restaurateurs' intentions and diners' preferences regarding music. This insight is crucial for restaurateurs aiming to create a dining experience that resonates with diverse customer preferences. Addressing this gap can lead to

more informed music selection strategies that cater to both ethnic and non-ethnic diners, thereby providing them with a more authentic dining experience.

Concerning the language spoken by ethnic restaurants' staff and their ethnicity, the existing literature suggests that hearing the ethnic language and being served by ethnic staff can positively influence the perception of authenticity (Kim and Baker, 2017). However, the current research argues that while the presence of these factors can be appreciated, both diners and restaurateurs tend to share a mutual understanding that such expectations can be unrealistic and impractical, considering the geographical distance from the referent country. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among both stakeholders that the ultimate authenticity of a meal is most effectively conveyed when prepared by chefs of the respective ethnic backgrounds.

Other visual elements, such as the interior design and decoration of ethnic restaurants, hold higher significance in establishing authenticity for both diners and restaurateurs. Despite evidence suggesting the impact of colour on different aspects of dining experiences (Tantanatewin and Inkarojrit, 2018; Piqueras-Fizman et al., 2013; Wardono, Hibino and Koyama, 2012), the findings of the current research do not strongly support it, as neither diners nor restaurateurs expressed substantial concerns. However, consistent with the existing literature, other factors such as unique cooking methods and ethnic tableware (Sukalakamala and Boyce, 2007) can not only evoke a sense of authenticity but also serve as a justification for a higher price point. These findings highlight the significance of strategic interior design in enhancing perceived authenticity,

contributing not only to research and practice in the hospitality industry but also benefiting the fields of architecture and design.

Finally, the role of olfactory elements such as food smell and infused scents was explored in the current research. While none of the stakeholders appreciate the idea of infused scent, existing literature argues that such scents can complement the overall dining experience, have unconscious influences in conveying certain messages, and have been effectively employed in various business settings (Spence, 2022; Ouyang et al., 2018 Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson, 1996).

A comparative summary of the research findings linked to sensory elements is presented below in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2 A comparative summary of the research key findings linked to the sensory elements

Sense	Sensory elements	Restaurateurs	Iranian Diners	Non-Iranian Diners
Vision	The inclusion of ethnic language on the signage	Mixed views	Important	Important
	Ensuring that ethnic language is not the sole option displayed on the signage.	Mixed views	Yes	Yes
	Menu in the ethnic languages and its link to authenticity	Mainly not important	Very important	Very important
	Altering the original food names.	No	No	No
	The presence of non-ethnic food items	No (with exceptions)	No (with exceptions)	No (with exceptions)
	Portion size and Authenticity are linked	Agreed	Partially agreed	Not really
Audition	Ethnic music and its link with authenticity	Mainly all kinds of music is fine	Ethnic music	Ethnic music
	Staff conversing in the ethnic language and authenticity	no link	nice but no link	no link
Olfaction	Infused scent	Not welcomed	Not welcomed	Not welcomed
Gustation	Unique Ingredients (e.g., Saffron) and authenticity	N/A	N/A	A sign of authenticity
	Altered recipes with a different taste and authenticity	Not authentic	Not authentic	Not authentic (but might not be able to tell)
	The challenges in sourcing ingredients & the quality difference can alter the final taste.	I struggle!	I understand!	I understand!

7.3 The influence of cultural practices on the provision of an authentic experience

The incorporation of elements reflective of Iranian hospitality appears to be notably effective and well-received in enhancing the dining experience. Practices such as extending warm welcomes, treating customers as esteemed guests, and ultimately treating them as 'God's beloved' are some of the fundamental aspects of the Iranian hospitality culture employed by restaurateurs. These practices, however, appear to be rooted in service providers' inherent personalities and cultural backgrounds rather than explicitly planned strategies. For instance, one strategy that is both employed by Iranian restaurateurs and highly appreciated by diners is the occasional offering of complimentary food and drinks. While this practice may not always appear to be the most financially sound decision, it has been proven to positively impact tipping behaviour (e.g. Seiter, 2007), and therefore can be considered an investment.

This observation holds significant implications for the food business and hospitality industry. Since each area, region, and culture embodies a wealth of cultural beliefs, values, and practices, and given their influence on service provision, restaurateurs, particularly those involved with ethnic cuisines, should identify relevant practices, refine them into practical strategies and implement them into their business practices. Such practices not only could positively influence the perception of authenticity but also could serve as unique competitive advantages. Given the limited research on this topic, the findings generated from this study are important in guiding future research and providing insights into an area that requires more academic attention.

CHAPTER 8 Conclusion

The conclusion chapter summarises the key findings of the current thesis in relation to the research's objectives and questions. It would be followed by section 8.2, the presentation of the theoretical implications and section 8.3, the managerial implications of the current research. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of the study and proposing suggestions for further research.

8.1 Summary of key findings in relation to research objectives and research questions

The aim of this study was to critically evaluate the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of restaurateurs and diners towards sensory strategies and their link with authenticity in Iranian restaurants in London. In this section, the researchers revisit the research objectives to discuss whether and how the findings of the study have answered the research questions.

The first research objective (**Objective 1**) was to review and critically discuss the existing literature on the application of sensory elements in the restaurant industry. The literature review for the current study was conducted in two levels. One a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the different aspects of the research topic (CHAPTER 2) and the other is a detailed systematic literature review (SLR) of sensory elements within dining settings (CHAPTER 3).

The SLR highlighted a substantial increase in scholarly publications on sensory cues in commercial dining environments throughout the 21st century, indicating a growing awareness and appreciation of the role that sensory experiences play in dining contexts. Furthermore, the review revealed a predominant use of

quantitative research methodologies over qualitative approaches, suggesting a preference for objective analysis in this field. A critical insight from the review concerns the source of data used in the identified studies. The majority of the research relies on diners' perceptions and preferences, revealing a significant gap in scholarly attention to the perspectives of service providers.

The review also uncovered geographical disparities in the distribution of scholarly contributions. The United States stands out as the leading country in terms of the volume of publications, with a stark contrast to the United Kingdom, which has significantly fewer contributions. Finally, among the five human senses, visual elements dominate the focus of existing research, with the majority of the studies examining at least one visual component, emphasising the necessity of giving equal attention to the other senses to develop a holistic understanding of multisensory dining environments.

The findings of the SLR not only provided the researcher with better insight into the research topic but also informed the research design and data collection (CHAPTER 4). The findings, justify and support the qualitative approach of the current study, the focus on both restaurateurs and diners, and the detailed multi-sensory investigation of the elements present in Iranian ethnic restaurants.

To achieve research **objectives 2** investigating restaurateurs' awareness and perception towards authenticity and research **objective 3**, analysing the approach that Iranian restaurateurs adopt to improve the sensory authentic experience of their customers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 restaurateurs. Overall, discussing authenticity and the strategic design of sensory elements to

influence it, tend to be new concepts for service providers (Section 5.2). Although specific sensory elements were identified throughout the interviews (Sections 5.3 – 5.6), and restaurateurs, in some cases, acknowledged their impact on diners' perceived authenticity, the design or presence of the sensory elements did not appear to be strategically planned with the intention of influencing diners' perception of authenticity.

To ensure the triangulation of the findings, the impact of sensory elements on the perception of authenticity among diners was investigated in **objective 4** of this thesis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 individuals, dividing them into equal quotas of Iranian and non-Iranian diners to ensure the representativeness of the findings.

Similar to restaurateurs, diners also find authenticity a less-discussed concept which they initially struggled to define. But overall, they believe that authenticity is fluid and subject to their previous experience and background (Sections 6.3.1.2 and 6.3.1.3). For many diners, an authentic experience is one that resonates with 'home' (6.3.1.5) and in many cases, authentic was synonymous with traditional (Section 6.3.2). The research then explored the impact of the human five senses on diners' expectations and perceptions of authenticity. It is important to note that the sense of touch (tactile), could not be investigated, as there was no way to link it with authenticity, and the existing literature mainly looks into tactile elements via temperature (e.g. environment temperature: Kim, Kang and Park, 2014), weight (e.g. menu weight: Magnini and Kim, 2016), and texture (e.g. food texture: Garaus, Weismayer, and Steiner, 2023).

The other findings of the current study are the significance of restaurant signage and specifically the language used on the signage on diners' perception of authenticity (Section 6.5.1). In terms of the interior design of restaurants, diners welcome the presence of cultural decorations (Section 6.5.2.1) and food preparation methods and tools (Section 6.5.2.3) and in some cases find it significant when judging the authenticity of their dining experience. Repetitive and cliché cultural elements, on the other hand, are found to have an opposite impact on their perception of authenticity (Section 6.5.2.2).

The ethnicity and uniforms of FOH staff are reported to have minimal influence on diners' perceptions of authenticity. Diners tend to be more concerned with the BOH, as some believe that an authentic dish is one which is prepared by ethnic individuals (Section 6.5.3).

Next, the visual elements of restaurant menus were investigated, and the majority of the diners agreed upon the positive impact of using original food names and the presence of the ethnic language -as well as the local language- on the menu (Section 6.5.4.2). The inclusion of non-ethnic food items on the menu sparked contrasting opinions among diners. Some believed such practice would hinder the perceived authenticity of the dining experiences, while others did not find it a factor that would detract from the authenticity of their experience (Section 6.5.4.3).

The final visual elements were tableware (Section 6.5.5.1), food portion6.5.5.2), and food presentation (Section 6.5.5.3). Prior experience and background were found to play an important role in shaping diners' judgements of their authenticity.

There were differences in the expectations of ethnic individuals (as well as non-ethnic diners with prior experience) compared to those with little to no experience.

The next category is auditory elements where the role of music (Section 6.6.1) and language spoken by restaurant staff (Section 6.6.2). In regard to music, it is agreed by a majority of the diners, that the presence of ethnic music would “add to the whole experience” and can enhance the authenticity of ethnic restaurants. Considering the language spoken by restaurant staff, the presence of the ethnic language can have a positive impact on the perceived authenticity, however, its absence does not seem to diminish the authenticity (Section 6.6.2).

The last two senses were olfaction and gustation. The food aroma tends to play a minor role in the overall perception of authenticity, with a slight significance for diners with more familiarity with the food. In such context, the aroma serves primarily as a trigger for memory and recognition, which would consequently heighten the perception of authenticity (Section 6.7.1).

The taste of food served can be an important indicator of authenticity, and for individuals with less familiarity with the original recipes, the taste of unique ingredients (e.g. Saffron) can be a sign of authenticity. Overall diners do not appreciate altered recipes which would change the final taste of a dish; however, they express an understanding of the difference in the quality of ingredients and challenges that ethnic restaurants can face in sourcing them.

Finally, via **objective 5**, the current research developed a framework to better understand the impact of sensory tools on perceived authenticity in ethnic restaurants. After drawing upon the findings of the current study, the conceptual

framework presented in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.4) was revised and developed further to present the link between authenticity and sensory elements within ethnic restaurants. The proposed research framework (Figure 8.1) expands the existing relevant models such as the S-M model (Hultén, 2015) (Section 1.8.2) and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) (Section 1.8.1) by taking several extra factors into consideration.

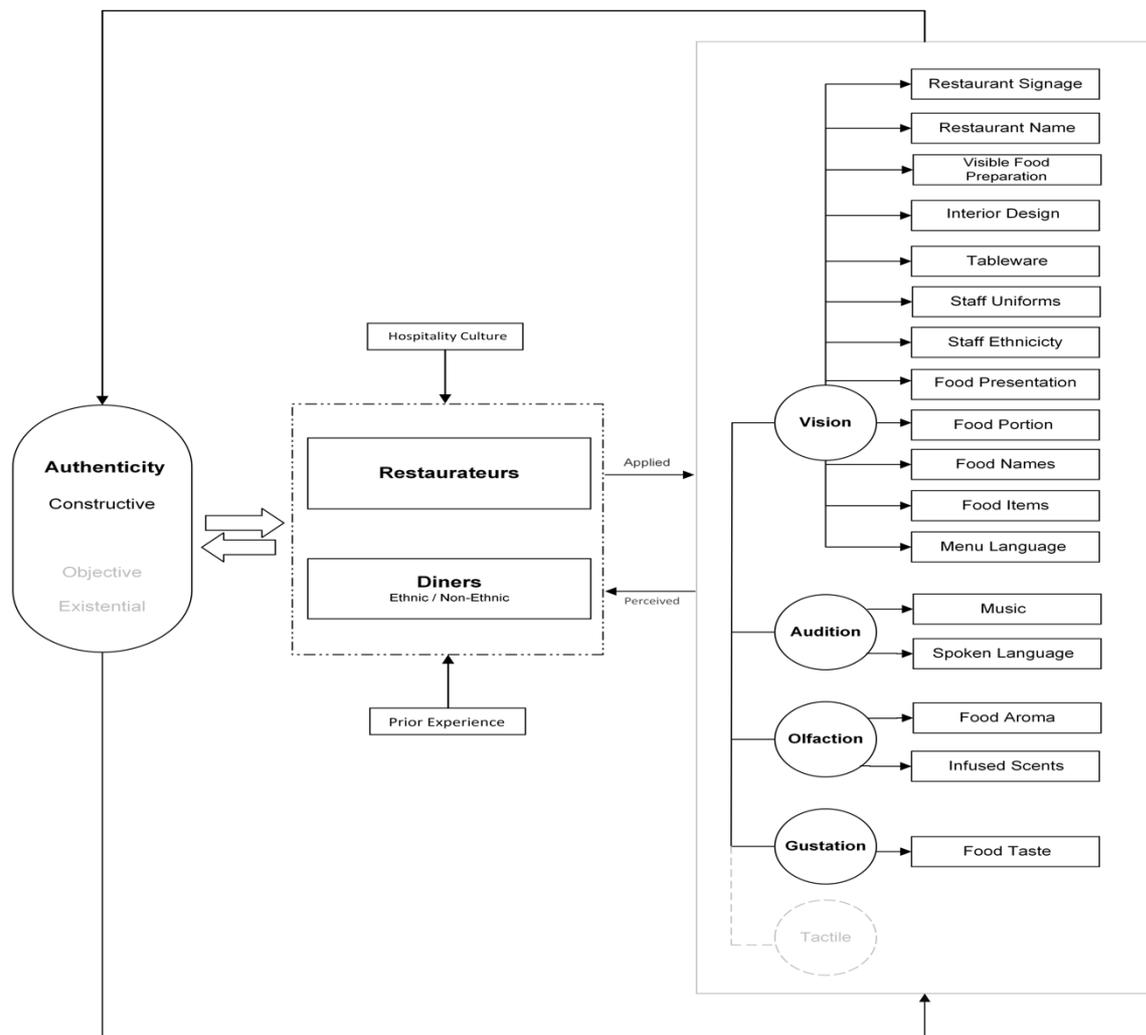


Figure 8.1 The link between sensory elements and perceived authenticity in ethnic restaurants

The first factor is, the impact of stakeholders' initial definition and understanding of authenticity, on how sensory strategies are developed (by restaurateurs), and how

are received (by diners). Perceived authenticity is subjective in nature, and not only varies from individual to individual but also can evolve over time. To ensure that the proposed framework takes into account the role of individuals' background and familiarity with the culture, the framework is designed by considering the findings from both Iranian and non-Iranian individuals in different positions (Sections 5.2.1 and 6.3.1).

The next factor is focused on the conscious and unconscious role of cultural hospitality practices, norms, and values, on both the service design and delivery, as well as how it is understood and received by diners. This perspective is a novel contribution to the literature of ethnic restaurants and is supported by the findings of the current research (5.7 and 6.4) on the importance of cultural practices and beliefs in hospitality within ethnic restaurants. The next original component of the framework is observing the role of prior experience and background knowledge on stakeholders' perception of authenticity, and how it consequently affects the expectations of the sensory elements.

Finally, through a careful review of the existing literature (CHAPTER 2 and CHAPTER 3), a thorough observation of the restaurants and the development of their sensory profile (Section 4.5.2), and in-depth interviews with restaurateurs and diners, this thesis expands the current knowledge on the significance of sensory elements in shaping perceived authenticity, by providing detailed insights and identifying novel perspectives of the human five senses.

8.2 Theoretical implications

The current research contributes to the body of literature by exploring the influences of sensory elements on the creation of authenticity in ethnic restaurants. Since, previous research is mainly focused on diners-centred and quantitative data, and the importance of focusing on service providers and collection of more in-depth data has been recognised (Tsai and Lu, 2012), the findings of the current thesis contribute to the existing knowledge by presenting a comprehensive investigation of the perspectives of both diners and restaurateurs, which was previously underdeveloped.

The current thesis presents a detailed research framework (Figure 8.1), demonstrating the links between perceived authenticity, stakeholders' backgrounds and prior experience, and the sensory elements within ethnic restaurants. The framework holds potential for application in researching ethnic restaurants of different ethnicities as well as comparative studies across different cultures.

The extant body of literature predominantly examines well-established cuisines such as Italian (Ebster and Guist, 2005), Chinese (e.g. Jang, Liu and Namkung, 2011), and Thai (e.g. Sukalakamala, and Boyce, 2007). The distinctive contribution of the present study is that it is the first research to explore Iranian ethnic restaurants. Given the growing popularity of Middle Eastern cuisines, it is essential for future researchers to explore this relatively understudied area of ethnic restaurants as well as other less investigated ethnicities.

The other unique aspect of the current study is that it is among one of the first to discuss the impact of cultural values, practices and norms on the sensory elements and strategies present in ethnic restaurants, the provision of hospitality and consequently the perception of authenticity.

8.3 Managerial implications

In navigating the competitive landscape of the restaurant industry, strategic management tailored to the unique expectations of the target market plays an essential role in ensuring sustained success and customer satisfaction. This section addresses key managerial implications designed for restaurateurs operating within the ethnic restaurant sector.

First, restaurateurs are advised to give extended focus to sensory strategies when developing their business models to establish a distinct competitive edge and consequently increase profitability. By strategically incorporating sensory elements into the dining experience, restaurants can create an authentic and memorable atmosphere that impacts their diners on a deeper level. It is crucial, however, to avoid cliché and overused elements that may dilute the authenticity and uniqueness of the dining experience.

The second point is to consider authenticity across multiple dimensions within an ethnic restaurant—such as concept design, staff training, marketing strategies, daily operations, and other key areas—as it is crucial and advantageous. These elements collectively create an authentic and memorable dining experience that resonates with customers. Additionally, it is important to continually evaluate and refine these strategies, as perceptions of authenticity are fluid and can shift over

time due to evolving consumer expectations and market dynamics. This can be achieved by closely monitoring the target market, reviewing customer feedback, and understanding and adapting to market trends.

Furthermore, when emphasising certain cultural hospitality practices (e.g. Iranian Mehman-Navazi), it is essential for restaurateurs to maintain a delicate balance. While sincere hospitality is valued, certain excessive gestures can unintentionally lead to negative outcomes (see sections 5.4.2 and 0 for the examples of restaurateurs' intentions and non-ethnic diners' perception of non-Iranian music being played in the restaurant). Overdoing hospitality may overwhelm diners, ultimately detracting from the overall dining experience. Therefore, maintaining a harmonious blend of warmth and professionalism is crucial for creating favourable customer interactions and ensuring continuing patronage.

In conclusion, strategic management tailored to the target market is essential for success in the competitive ethnic restaurant sector. Focusing on sensory strategies, authenticity, and balanced cultural hospitality practices ensures memorable dining experiences and sustained customer satisfaction.

8.4 Limitations and Suggestions for further research

The following section outlines and discusses the limitations of the current study, along with suggestions for researchers wishing to explore similar topics.

While the decision to employ a mono-method approach (qualitative) can be argued as a limitation, it is crucial to note that this choice was made due to the current state of qualitative research and the limited availability of qualitative evidence in the field (see Section 3.4.3). However, it is recognised that future research could

benefit from employing a mixed-method approach to enhance the generalizability of findings.

The current study encountered unforeseen challenges in recruiting participants from the Iranian restaurateur community. Despite implementing strategies to mitigate these challenges (see Section 1.10), these barriers ultimately prevented the project from reaching a higher number of interviews with restaurateurs. Therefore, it is recommended that similar projects aim for a larger sample size of service providers to obtain more comprehensive insights.

Furthermore, since this study focuses on Iranian ethnic restaurants in London, it would be valuable to replicate the research across other ethnic restaurants to identify potential similarities and differences. It is also suggested to conduct research within the contexts of multiple distinct hospitality cultures (e.g. Western, Asian, and African), to develop a deeper understanding of how culture influences the provision of hospitality in ethnic restaurants. Finally, further cross-national research could be beneficial to thoroughly examine and compare how sensory strategies are perceived and how authenticity is understood in the context of both Iran and the UK.

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Appendices

1. List of the articles included in the systematic literature review

No	Title	Author	Year
1	The influence of background music on the behaviour of restaurant patrons	Ronald E.Milliman	1986
2	Effect of physical environments and locus of control on service evaluation - A replication and extension	Siew Meng Leong, Swee Hoon Ang, Lynda Hui Lin Low	1997
3	The impact of pitch, volume and tempo on the atmospheric effects of music	Malcom Sullivan	2002
4	Exploring the effects of Music atmospherics on menu item selection	Andrew Hale Feinstein, Tammy S.Hinshton, Mehmet Edrem	2002
5	From intangibility to tangibility on service quality perceptions: a comparison study between consumers and service providers in four service industries	Santos, J.	2002
6	Examining managers' theories of how atmospheric music affects perception, behaviour and financial performance	Charles S. Areni	2003
7	Exploring managers' implicit theories of atmospheric music: comparing academic analysis to industry insight	Charles S.Areni	2003
8	The Relative Importance of Food, Atmosphere, and Fairness of Wait: The Case of a Full-service Restaurant	Joanne M.Sulek and Rhonda L. Hensley	2004
9	Effect of ambience on food intake and food choice	Stroebele, N. and De Castro, J.M.	2004
10	Effects of atmospherics on revenue generation in small business restaurants	Jess Shields	2006
11	The Combined Effects of the Physical Environment and Employee Behavior on Customer Perception of Restaurant Service Quality	Elieen A.Wall and Leonard L.Berry	2007
12	The effect of contextual variables on food acceptability: A confirmatory study	King, S.C., Meiselman, H.L., Hottenstein, A.W., Work, T.M. and Cronk, V	2007
13	accounting for the joint effects of the servicescape and service exchange on consumers' satisfaction evaluation	Karthik Namasivayam, Anna S.Mattila	2007
14	The effect of environmental perceptions on behavioral intentions through emotions: The case of upscale restaurants.	Kisang Rye, SooCheong (Shawn) Jang	2007
15	Exploring design among small hospitality and tourism operations	Abel D.Alonso	2008
16	Servicescape and loyalty intentions: an empirical investigation	Lloyd C.Harris, Chris Ezeh	2008
17	Interactive quality control of service encounters in theme restaurants	Tsuifang Hsieh, Yungkun Chen	2009
18	Effects of experiential value on customer satisfaction with service encounters in luxury-hotel restaurants	Cerdric His-Jui Wu, Rong-Da Liang	2009
19	The Roles of the Physical Environment, Price Perception, and Customer Satisfaction in Determining Customer Loyalty in the Restaurant Industry	Heesup Han, Kisang Ryu	2009
20	Perceived quality, emotions, and behavioral intentions: Application of an extended Mehrabian-Russell model to restaurants	SooCheong (Shawn) Chang, Young Namkung	2009

21	Customers' cognitive, emotional, and actionable response to the servicescape: A test of the moderating effect of the restaurant type	Woo Gon Kim, Yun Ji Moon	2009
22	The effects of dining atmospherics: An extended Mehrabian and Russell model	Yinghua Liu, SooCheong (Shawn) Jang	2009
23	Drivers of customers' service experiences: a study in the restaurant industry	U.Walter, B.Edvardsson, A.Ostrom	2010
24	What really brings them back?: The impact of tangible quality on affect and intention for casual dining restaurant patrons	C Kincaid, S Baloglu, Z Mao, J Busser	2010
25	Influence of the Quality of Food, Service, and Physical Environment on Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intention in Quick-Casual Restaurants: Moderating Role of Perceived Price	Kisang Rye, Heesup Han	2010
26	Consumers' ideal eating out experience as it refers to restaurant style: A case study	Abel D.Alonso and Martin A.O'Neill	2010
27	Exploring consumers' images of open restaurant kitchen design	Abel D.Alonso and Martin A.O'Neill	2010
28	To what extent does restaurant kitchen design influence consumers' eating out experience? An exploratory study	Abel D.Alonso and Martin A.O'Neill	2010
29	Enhancing the assessment of tangible service quality through the creation of a cleanliness measurement scale	Nelson Barber and Joseph M.Scarcelli	2010
30	Effects of service quality and food quality: The moderating role of atmospherics in an ethnic restaurant segment	Jooyeon Ha, SooCheong (Shawn) Jang	2010
31	Effects of sound pressure levels and sensitivity to noise on mood and behavioural intent in a controlled fine dining restaurant environment	Christopher C.Novak, Joseph La Lopa, Robert E.Novak	2010
32	New or repeat customers: How does physical environment influence their restaurant experience?	Kisang Rye, Heesup Han	2011
33	The Psychological Effects of Foreign-Language Restaurant Signs on Potential Diners	Vincent P.Magnini, Todd Miller, BeomCheol (Peter) Kim	2011
34	Effects of authentic atmospherics in ethnic restaurants: investigating Chinese restaurants	Jang, S.S., Liu, Y. and Namkung, Y.	2011
35	Consumers' Responses to Table Spacing in Restaurants	By Stephani K. A. Robson ¹ , Sheryl E. Kimes ¹ , Franklin D. Becker ¹ , and Gary W. Evans ¹	2011
36	Restaurant's atmospheric elements: What the customer wants	Hashim Fadzil Ariffin*, Mohamad Fahmi Bibon & Raja Puteri Saadiah Raja Abdullah	2012
37	Clothing Color and Tipping: Gentlemen Patrons Give More Tips to Waitresses with Red Clothes	Nicolas Gueguen, Celine Jacob	2012
38	Influence of restaurant atmospherics on patron satisfaction and behavioural intentions	Vincent C.S Heung, Tianming Gu	2012
39	Effects of Interior Colors, Lighting and Decors on Perceived Sociability, Emotion and Behavior Related to Social Dining	Wardono, P., Hibino, H. and Koyama, S.	2012
40	Role of Service Environment for Restaurants: The Youth Customers' Perspective	Boo Ho Voon	2012
41	The physical environment as a driver of customers' service experiences at restaurants	Walter, U. and Edvardsson, B.	2012
42	THE RELATIONSHIP OF FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANT ATTRIBUTES, EVALUATIVE FACTORS AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTION	Wang, C.H. and Chen, S.C.	2012
43	The effects of dining atmospherics on behavioural intentions through quality perception	Jooyeon Ha, SooCheong (Shawn) Jang	2012
44	linking servicescape to customer satisfaction: exploring the role of competitive strategy	Miles, P., Miles, G. and Cannon, A.	2012

45	The influence of the quality of the physical environment, food, and service on restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions	Ryu, K., Lee, H.R. and Kim, W.G.	2012
46	Fast Food restaurant lighting and Music can reduce calorie intake and increase Satisfaction	Wansink, B. and Van Ittersum, K.	2012
47	A mixed method approach to understanding the role of emotions and sensual delight in dining experience	Arora, R.	2012
48	"Having a drink in a bar": An immersive approach to explore the effects of context on drink choice	Sester, C., Deroy, O., Sutan, A., Galia, F., Desmarchelier, J.F., Valentin, D. and Dacremont, C.	2013
49	The impact of nostalgia triggers on emotional responses and revisit intentions in luxury restaurants: The moderating role of hiatus	Jinsoo Hwang, Sunghyup Sean Hyun	2013
50	Mechanism of customer value in restaurant consumption: Employee hospitality and entertainment cues as boundary conditions	Chih-Ching Teng, Jung-Hua Chang	2013
51	Restaurant customers' perception of noise and their satisfaction and loyalty behaviors	CAROLA RAAB, DINA MARIE V. ZEMKE, and JEAN L. HERTZMAN, DIPENDRA SINGH	2013
52	The effect of servicescape of casual restaurants on youths dining experience.	Jana, A. and Chatterjee, R.	2014
53	Matching visitation-motives and restaurant attributes in casual dining restaurants.	Ponnam, A. and Balaji, M.S	2014
54	Determinants of a restaurant average meal price: An application of the hedonic pricing model.	Yim, E.S., Lee, S. and Kim, W.G.	2014
55	The product-related failures in restaurants.	Chan, W.L., Hassan, W.M.W. and Boo, H.C.	2014
56	Mechanic clues vs. humanic clues: Students' perception towards service quality of fast food restaurants in Taylor's University campus.	Garg, A.	2014
57	The antecedents of satisfaction and revisit intentions for full-service restaurants	Marinkovic, V., Senic, V., Ivkov, D., Dimitrovski, D. and Bjelic, M.	2014
58	Sign of the times: Testing consumer response to local food signage within a casual dining restaurant	Campbell, J.M. and DiPietro, R.B	2014
59	The influence of servicescape and local food attributes on pleasure and revisit intention in an upscale-casual dining restaurant	DiPietro, R.B. and Campbell, J.	2014
60	A better investment in luxury restaurants: Environmental or non-environmental cues?	Hyun, S.S. and Kang, J.	2014
61	Physical Evidence of Small Theme Restaurant in Indonesia: A Case Study of Ramen House	Puspita, O.D.,	2015
62	Factors affecting choice and image of ethnic restaurants in Serbia.	Marinkovic, V., Senic, V. and Mimovic, P	2015
63	Visual Merchandising and its Marketing Components in the Chosen Restaurants in Slovakia	Kleinová, K., Paluchová, J., Berčík, J. and Horská, E.	2015
64	The effects of luxury restaurant environments on diners' emotions and loyalty	Chen, A., Peng, N. and Hung, K.P.	2015
65	Positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers in full-service restaurants: does aesthetic labor matter?	Tsaur, S.H., Luoh, H.F. and Syue, S.S	2015
66	The Impact of Servicescape Cues on Consumer Prepurchase Authenticity Assessment and Patronage Intentions to Ethnic Restaurants	Wang, C.Y. and Mattila, A.S., 2015	2015
67	Antecedents of mandatory customer participation in service encounters: An empirical study	Chen, S.C., Raab, C. and Tanford, S.	2015
68	The Full-Service Dining Experience: An Assessment of the Generation-Specific Determinants of Customer Loyalty	Jin, N., Line, N.D. and Ann, S.H.	2015

69	Studying the impact of plating on ratings of the food served in a naturalistic dining context	Michel, C., Velasco, C., Fraemohs, P. and Spence, C	2015
70	Determinants of authentic experiences	Kim, J.H. and Jang, S.S.	2016
71	Imagined salad and steak restaurants: Consumers' colour, music and emotion associations with different dishes	Kontukoski, M., Paakki, M., Thureson, J., Uimonen, H. and Hopia, A.	2016
72	ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF RESTAURANT SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS	Tripathi, G. and Dave, K.	2016
73	Factors Affecting Restaurant Image in KPK, Pakistan: Moderating Role of Personality Trait	Ayaz, M., Manzoor, S.R. and Khan, A.	2016
74	Investigating the impact of key dimensions of service quality on customers' satisfaction and loyalty: Evidences from the restaurant industry in Sudan	Diab, D., Mohammed, H.E., Hassam Mansour, E. and Saad, O.	2016
75	The Impact of Servicescape on Quality Perception and Customers' Behavioral Intentions	Chang, J.C	2016
76	Measuring the customers' perception of tangible service quality in the restaurant industry: an emphasis on the upscale dining segment	Lee, L., Lee, M.J. and Dewald, B.	2016
77	The influences of restaurant menu font style, background color, and physical weight on consumers' perceptions.	Magnini, V.P. and Kim, S.	2016
78	Exploring the comparative salience of restaurant attributes: A conjoint analysis approach	Rhee, H.T., Yang, S.B. and Kim, K.	2016
79	Music Congruity Effects on Product Memory, Perception, and Choice	North, A.C., Sheridan, L.P. and Areni, C.S.	2016
80	The impacts of service provider name, ethnicity, and menu information on perceived authenticity and behaviors	Kim, K. and Baker, M.A.	2017
81	Customer responses to food-related attributes in ethnic restaurants.	Kim, J.H., Youn, H. and Rao, Y	2017
82	The authentic service employee: Service employees' language use for authentic service experiences.	Kraak, J.M. and Holmqvist, J.	2017
83	Factors influencing word of mouth behaviour in the restaurant industry	Jalilvand, M.R., Salimipour, S., Elyasi, M. and Mohammadi, M.	2017
84	Impact of hotel-restaurant image and quality of physical-environment, service, and food on satisfaction and intention	Han, H. and Hyun, S.S.	2017
85	Quality Measurement In Restaurant Industry From The Marketing Perspective: A Comparison Of Guests' And Managers' Quality Perceptions	Kukanja, M.	2017
86	Does Looking Delicious Mean Really Delicious? The Effects regarding Menu Design on Consumer's ordering Behavior	Lee, Y.H., Wang, C.M. and Lee, W.H.	2017
87	The effects of Teppanyaki restaurant stimuli on diners' emotions and loyalty	Peng, N., Chen, A. and Hung, K.P.	2017
88	Assessing quality of food, service and customer experience at a restaurant: the case of a student run restaurant in the USA	Josiam, B.M., Malave, R., Foster, C. and Baldwin, W.	2017
89	Shining light on atmospherics: how ambient light influences food choices.	Biswas, D., Szocs, C., Chacko, R. and Wansink, B.	2017
90	The Waiter's Weight: Does a server's BMI relate to how much food diners order?.	Döring, T. and Wansink, B.	2017
91	The influences of cleanliness and employee attributes on perceived service quality in restaurants in a developing country	Truong, N., Nisar, T., Knox, D. and Prabhakar, G	2017
92	The role of language, appearance, and smile on perceptions of authenticity versus rapport	Baker, M.A. and Kim, K.	2018

93	An investigation on customer revisit intention to theme restaurants	Meng, B. and Choi, K., 2018	2018
94	Perceptions of fine dining restaurants in Pakistan: What influences customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions?	Shahzadi, M., Malik, S.A., Ahmad, M. and Shabbir, A.	2018
95	FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' CHOICE OF FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS	Blešić, I., Raljić, J.P., Pivac, T. and Ivkov, M.	2018
96	The influence of emotional response to interior color on restaurant entry decision	Tantanatewin, W. and Inkarojrit, V.	2018
97	An expanded servicescape framework as the driver of place attachment and word of mouth	Line, N.D., Hanks, L. and Kim	2018
98	Exploring factors on customers' restaurant choice: an analysis of restaurant attributes	Liu, P. and Tse, E.C.Y.	2018
99	The effect of service providers' facial hair on restaurant customers' perceptions.	im, S.B., Lee, S. and Kim, D.Y.	2018
100	Does the visual composition of a dish influence the perception of portion size and hedonic preference?	Rowley, J. and Spence, C.	2018
101	Hey big spender! A golden (color) atmospheric effect on tipping behavior.	Lee, N.Y., Noble, S.M. and Biswas, D.	2018
102	An examination of the perceived value of organic dining.	Lu, L. and Chi, C.G.Q.	2018
103	Consumer Response to Authentic-Language Versus English-Language Menu Labeling in Ethnic Dining	Choi, S., Liu, S.Q. and Mattila, A.S.	2018
104	When beauty backfires: the effects of server attractiveness on consumer taste perceptions.	Lin, L., Hoegg, J. and Aquino, K.	2018
105	Applying ANP to analyse sensory experience in restaurants	Chang, W.L.	2019
106	Sounds like a healthy retail atmospheric strategy: effects of ambient music and background noise on food sales.	Biswas, D., Lund, K. and Szocs, C.	2019
107	Perceived quality, authenticity, and price in tourists' dining experiences: Testing competing models of satisfaction and behavioral intentions	Muskat, B., Hörtnagl, T., Prayag, G. and Wagner, S.	2019
108	A customer value perspective to service experiences in restaurants	Yrjölä, M., Rintamäki, T., Saarijärvi, H., Joensuu, J. and Kulkarni, G.	2019
109	The influence of menu design, menu item descriptions and menu variety on customer satisfaction. A case study of Egypt	Baiomy, A.E., Jones, E. and Goode, M.M.	2019
110	Impact of 'Dining atmospherics' and 'Perceived food-quality' on customer re-patronage intention in fast-casual restaurants.	Mathur, T. and Gupta, A.	2019
111	Cost-Effective Service Excellence: Exploring the Relationships Among Restaurants' Operational Efficiency, Size and Service Quality.	Kukanja, M. and Planinc, T	2019
112	Can plate colour promote appetite and joy while dining? An investigative study in Chinese fine dining restaurants.	Chen, Y.C., Tsui, P.L., Lee, C.S. and Chen, G.L.	2019
113	Building brand relationship for restaurants An examination of other customers, brand image, trust, and restaurant attributes	Erkmen, E. and Hancer, M.	2019
114	Effect of dining experience on future intention in quick service restaurants	Richardson, S., Lefrid, M., Jahani, S., Munyon, M.D. and Rasoolimanesh, S.M.	2019
115	The social servicescape: A multidimensional operationalization	Line, N.D. and Hanks, L	2019
116	Love is in the menu: Leveraging healthy restaurant brands with handwritten typeface	Liu, S.Q., Choi, S. and Mattila, A.S.	2019

117	The creation of memorable dining experiences: formative index construction.	Cao, Y., Li, X.R., DiPietro, R. and So, K.K.F.	2019
118	The impacts of descriptive food names on consumer impressions	Kim, S. and Magnini, V.P.	2020
119	A holistic aesthetic experience model: Creating a harmonious dining environment to increase customers' perceived pleasure	Hornig, Jeou-Shyan; Hsu, Hsuan	2020
120	Factors influencing consumer menu-item selection in a restaurant context	Peters, Kimberley; Hervé Remaud, Pr.	2020
121	Exploring the role of service quality, atmosphere and food for revisits in restaurants by using a e-mystery guest approach	Bichler, Bernhard Fabian; Pikkemaat, Birgit; Peters, Mike	2020
122	The impact of lighting and table linen as ambient factors on meal intake and taste perception	Bschaden, A.; Dörsam, A. F.; Cvetko, K.; Kalamala, T.; Stroebele-Benschop, N.	2020
123	Satisfaction and revisit intentions at fast food restaurants	Rajput, Amer; Gahfoor, Raja Zohaib	2020
124	The effects of indoor plants on customers' shopping decisions in a restaurant environment	Yildirim, Kemal	2020
125	Exploring the impact of background music on customers' perceptions of ethnic restaurants: The moderating role of dining companions	Wen, H., Leung, X. and Pongtornphurt, Y.	2020
126	A holistic model of the servicescape in fast casual dining	Line, N.D. and Hanks, L.	2020
127	The effect of type and level of background noise on food liking: A laboratory non-focused listening test	Alamir, Mahmoud A.; Hansen, Kristy	2021
128	The role of nostalgia-evoking stimuli at nostalgia-themed restaurants in explaining benefits, consumption value and post-purchase behavioral intention	Gu, Qiushi; Li, Minglong; Kim, Seongseop (Sam)	2021
129	Investigating the satisfaction of Cairo casual-dining restaurants architectural atmospherics and its influences on the users' behavioral intentions: On-site survey	Rabbow, Emad H.	2021
130	Influence of servicescape on behavioural intentions through mediation and moderation effects: A study on Malaysia's full-service restaurants	Asghar Ali, Muhammad; Ting, Ding Hooi; Salim, Lina; Ahmad-Ur-Rehman, Muhammad	2021
131	On the bright side: The influence of brightness on overall taste intensity perception	van der Heijden, Kimberley; Festjens, Anouk; Goukens, Caroline	2021
132	Modelling the priority attributes of customer loyalty in Philippine single-dish restaurants	Padillo Jr, Clotildo; Go, Noella; Manreal, Pacco; Samson, Samuel; Galli, Brian; Yamagishi, Kafferine; Promentilla, Michael Angelo; Ocampo, Lanndon	2021
133	How do restaurant atmospherics influence restaurant authenticity? An integrative framework and empirical evidence	Al-Kilani, Shaymaa; El Hedhli, Kamel	2021
134	Making "Sense" of the Middle of the Pyramid Consumer's Dining Experience	Kleinhans, Elsabe Hendrina; Van Heerden, Cornelius Hendrik; Kleynhans, Isabella Catharina	2021
135	Factors influencing food consumption satisfaction and purchase decisions of restaurant consumers	Maziriri, Eugene Tafadzwa; Rukuni, Tarisai Fritz; Chuchu, Tinashe	2021
136	Influence of servicescape stimuli on word-of-mouth intentions: An integrated model to indigenous restaurants	Ren-Fang Chao; Fu Yi; Chia-Hsiang Liang	2021
137	The Effect of Servicescape on Revisit Intention in Restaurants: The Mediating Effect of Brand Familiarity	GülertekiN, Seray; Genç, Volkan	2021
138	In darkness we seek light: The impact of focal and general lighting designs on customers' approach intentions toward restaurants	Wu, Laurie; He, Zeya; King, Ceridwyn; Mattila, Anna S.	2021

139	Relative Effects of Physical Environment and Employee Performance on Customers' Emotions, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions in Upscale Restaurants	Ryu, Kisang; Kim, Hyun Jeong; Lee, Hwangyu; Kwon, Bongheon	2021
140	Background music tempo effects on food evaluations and purchase intentions	Pantoja, Felipe; Borges, Adilson	2021
141	The effect of servicescape on place attachment and experience evaluation: the importance of exoticism and authenticity in an ethnic restaurant	Kim, Minjung; Lee, Gyumin	2022
142	Tasting More Than Just Food: Effect of Aesthetic Appeal of Plate Patterns on Food Perception	Zhang, Siyue; Qian, Jinzi; Wu, Chenjing; He, Dexian; Zhang, Wei; Yan, Jing; He, Xianyou	2022
143	Does Background Music Affect Silent Dining Emotions? An Empirical Study of Restaurants during COVID-19	Chen, Yen-Cheng; Chiang, Ming-Chen; Lee, Ching-Sung; Tsui, Pei-Ling	2022
144	Restaurants' outdoor signs say more than you think: An enquiry from a linguistic landscape perspective	Song, Hanqun; Yang, Huijun; Ma, Emily	2022
145	Ethnic restaurants' outdoor signage: the effect of colour and name on consumers' food perceptions and dining intentions	Song, Hanqun; Yang, Huijun	2022
146	Nature Ambience in a Lunch Restaurant Has the Potential to Evoke Positive Emotions, Reduce Stress, and Support Healthy Food Choices and Sustainable Behavior: A Field Experiment among Finnish Customers	Vanhatalo, Saara; Liedes, Hilikka; Pennanen, Kyösti	2022
147	The sound of silence: Presence and absence of sound affects meal duration and hedonic eating experience	Mathiesen, Signe Lund; Hopia, Anu; Ojansivu, Pauliina; Byrne, Derek Victor; Wang, Qian Janice	2022
148	Surviving the new-normal: a study on physical servicescape and visitor behavior in quick-service restaurants in malls in Surabaya, Indonesia	Dr. Njo, Anastasia; Gunawan, Kevin; Rahardjo, Drs Jani	2022
149	Memorable dining experiences with five senses: Conceptualization and scale development	Liu, Chyong-Ru; Wang, Yao-Chin; Kuo, Tonny Menglun; Chen, Hsuan; Tsui, Cheng-Hsiung	2022
150	Priorities of consumers for restaurant preferences: A conjoint analysis study on generation Z	Sezgin, Erkan; Uyanik, Beyza	2022
151	Exploring the effects of customers' assessments of a restaurant's atmospherics and emotional assessments on a fine-dining experience and intentions to return	Leong, Aliana Man Wai; Chen, Kuan-Ying; Chen, Hung-Bin; Chiang, Tai-En; Huan, Tzung-Cheng	2023
152	Food neophilics' choice of an ethnic restaurant: The moderating role of authenticity	Premordia, Inda; Gál, Timea	2023
153	How do ethnically congruent music and meal drive food choices?	Szakál, Dorina; Cao, Xu; Fehér, Orsolya; Gere, Attila	2023
154	Traditional restaurant managers' use of sensory marketing to maintain customer satisfaction: Findings from PLS-SEM and fsQCA	Silaban, Pantas H.; Chen, Wen-Kuo; Eunike, Ixora Javanisa; Silalahi, Andri Dayarana K.	2023
155	Multisensory interaction in the evaluation of beverages and environment for Japanese participants: Flavor, palatability, and cultural impressions	Ikeda, Tsunagu; Morishita, Masanao; Akada, Tomoya; Uchida, Masaaki; Matsubara, Naoki	2023
156	Displaying of religious images in restaurants and cafes in Malaysia: A case of double-edged sword	Madun, Azian; Kamarulzaman, Yusniza	2023
157	How sensory perceptions and sensory brand experience influence customer behavioral intentions in the context of cartoon-themed restaurants	Chang, Kuo-Chien; Cheng, Yi-Sung	2023
158	Intrinsic and Extrinsic Cue Words of Locally Grown Food Menu Items and Consumers' Choice at Hyper-Local Restaurants: An Eye-Tracking Study	Conoly, Yoonah Kim; Lee, Yee Ming	2023

159	Blowing minds with exploding dish names/images: The effect of implied explosion on consumer behavior in a restaurant context	Yu, Junwei; Droulers, Olivier; Lacoste-Badie, Sophie	2023
160	Wine tasters' sensory response to delicate and robust flower arrangements	Rodrigues, Heber; Richards, Areta; Carvalho, Fabiana M.	2023
161	Awareness and perceptions of ethnic restaurant managers towards authenticity and sensory strategies – A case study of Persian ethnic restaurants in London	Sattarzadeh, Neda; Tsiami, Amalia; Maxim, Cristina; Iordanova, Elitza	2023
162	The influence of ethnic food and its visual presentation on customer response: The processing fluency perspective	Youn, Hyewon	2024
163	An angular vs. circular servicescape? The impact of shape cues and music tempo on solo diners	Peng, Lavi (Zixi); Luo, Anqi (Angie); Mattila, Anna S.	2024

2. SLR extracted data and the Data Extraction Template

A snapshot of the data extraction template with examples of data is presented below (5 articles). The complete template including the detailed list of the SLR articles is available at: [SLR data and template](#).

No	Title	Author	Year	Journal	Research Approach	Source of data	Sensory element(s)	Location
1	The influence of background music on the behaviour of restaurant patrons	Ronald E.Milliman	1986	Journal of consumer research	Quantitative	Diners	Music	U.S
2	Effect of physical environments and locus of control on service evaluation - A replication and extension	Siew Meng Leong, Swee Hoon Ang, Lynda Hui Lin Low	1997	Journal of retailing and consumer services	Quantitative	Diners	Physical environment	Singapore
3	The impact of pitch, volume and tempo on the atmospheric effects of music	Malcom Sullivan	2002	International journal of Retail and distribution management	Quantitative	Diners	Music	Not given
4	Exploring the effects of Music atmospherics on menu item selection	Andrew Hale Feinstein, Tammy S.Hinskon, Mehmet Edrem	2002	Journal of Food Service business research	Quantitative	Diners	Music	U.S
5	From intangibility to tangibility on service quality perceptions: a comparison study between consumers and service providers in four service industries	Santos, J.	2002	managing service quality: An international journal	Mixed	Diners and Restaurateurs	staff appearance, environment, cleanness	UK

3. Observation Template

Name of the restaurant:	Code
Date and time of visit:	

			Notes
Restaurant exterior	Signage	Design: Iranian elements: Yes No Language: Farsi English Both	
	Exterior design & decor	Iranian elements Yes No Colours:	
	Aroma	Food aroma: Yes No Other	
	Interior visibility	Clear visibility of any cultural element (e.g., Tanoor, Manghal, etc.) from the windows: Yes No	
	Other		

			Notes
Restaurant Interior	Interior design & decor	Wall décor (wallpaper, paintings, pictures, etc.): Cultural elements Yes No	
		Other decorations (statue, antiques, etc.): Cultural elements Yes No	
		Floor: Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Ceiling: Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Lighting: Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Furniture: Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Colour scheme: Other	
	Tableware	Serveware and cutlery: Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Tablecloth (if applicable): Cultural elements: Yes No	
		Other	
	Atmosphere aroma	Smell of the food Yes No	
		Special scent infused in the air Yes No	
	Kitchen	Authentic cooking style and tools (if visible) Yes No	
		Other	

			Notes
Music & Entertainment	Background music	Iranian music Non-Iranian music Classical music	
	Live music	Yes No If yes: Iranian live music Other	
	Other		

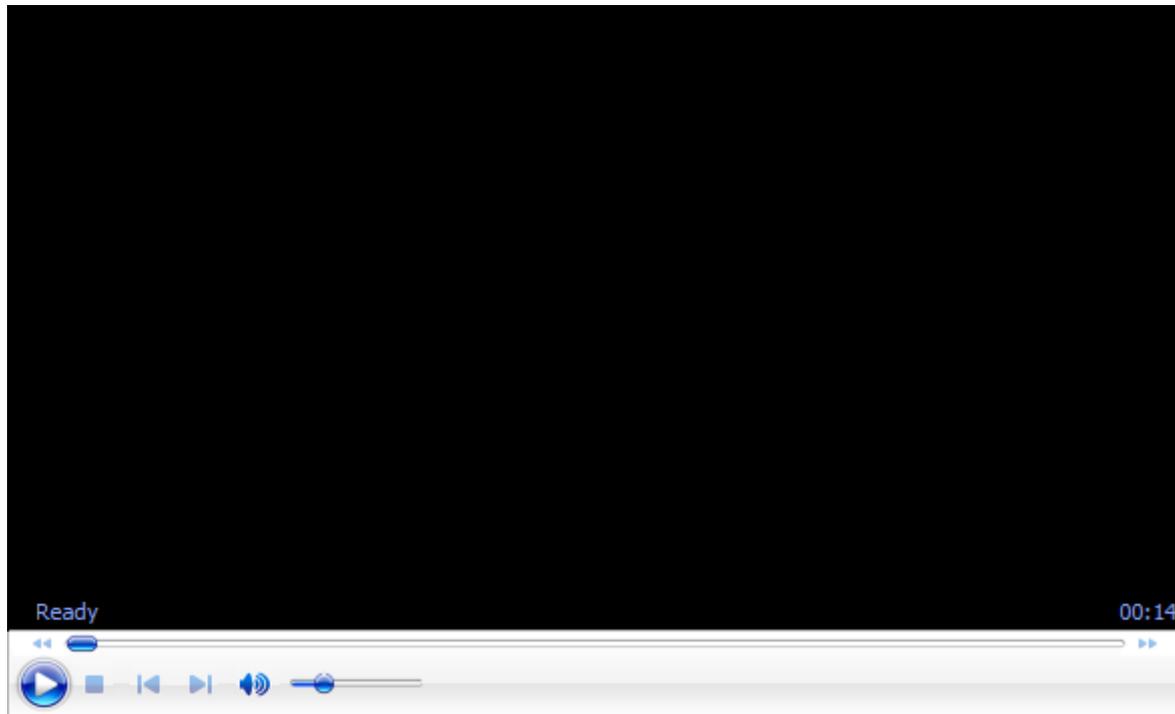
			Notes
Service providers (staff)	Uniforms	Cultural element: Yes No	
	Language spoken	With guests: Farsi English With each other: Farsi English	
	Ethnicity	Front of house: Iranian non-Iranian Both Back of house (if visible): Iranian non-Iranian Both	
	Other		

			Notes
Menu	Additional information	Additional information (food, culture, history, etc.) Yes No	
	Design	Cultural elements Yes No	
		Colour	
	Language	Farsi English Both	
	Food names	Iranian name English name Iranian (+ English description) English (+Farsi explanation)	
	Food items	Iranian only: Yes No	
	Font	If Farsi menu available: Regular font Calligraphy	
Other			

			Notes
Food	Presentation		
	Portion		
	Other		

4. Sensory profile example

Please click play for the full experience.



** Some of the photos are taken from the restaurant social media platforms with their permission due to better quality.

1. Interview Guide (Restaurateurs)

Name of the restaurant:
Name of the interviewee:
Position:
Date and time of the interview:

		No	Question	Done
Background information	Participant's experience and background	1	To begin with, could you tell me about yourself and what happened that you entered the restaurant industry? OR How did you come to manage this specific restaurant?	
Knowledge, perception, understanding	Participant's definition/understanding of authenticity and the restaurant positioning.	2	How would you define authenticity in regard to what you do?	
		3	Would you introduce [name of the restaurant] as an authentic Persian restaurant? Why? How much being an authentic Persian restaurant matters to you? Why?	
Atmospheric authenticity	Exterior design	4	How and why did you choose your current signage and the exterior design? Do you think that the restaurant's exterior design and signage reflect the Persian authenticity?	
	Interior design	5	How about the interior elements? Things like the decoration, the colour scheme, and the furnishing How/why did you choose them? Do you think restaurant's interior design would reflect the Persian authenticity? OR Did you have the authentic Persian elements in mind when designing the restaurant?	
	Tableware	6	How did you choose the tableware that you have? Do you think your restaurant's tableware are expected to be seen in an authentic Persian restaurant?	
	music and live entertainment	6	What kind of music is played at the restaurant? How do you choose the music that is played in the restaurant? Do you think it is important to play Persian music in the restaurant?	
		7	Does the restaurant have any live entertainments like music, dance...? Why did you choose (not) to have it? Do you think offering live entertainments would impact the Persian authenticity?	

	Staff nationality	8	Are all your staff Persian? Why? Is it important to have only Persian employees? What do you think your guests think?	
	Language spoken by staff	9	What languages do your staff speak in the restaurant? Do you have any rules for the language spoken by staff in the restaurant?	
	Staff uniforms	10	How did you choose to have these uniforms? If uniforms have Persian elements: can you tell me more about the design of your uniforms? If no specific uniform: Have you considered having specific uniforms? Why/Why not?	
Food authenticity	Food preparation method	11	Is there a reason for having the (a visual element like a traditional grill which is visible to the customers) here? (if applicable) What is your guests' reaction to it? Do you think showing the traditional food preparation method would impact the perceived authenticity by guests?	
	Food taste	12	Let's talk about the food now, do you think the food that you serve tastes like an authentic Persian dish? How did you choose the food that you serve and their recipes?	
	Food presentation	13	What about the food presentation and the way that you serve the food? Do you think presentation of the food you serve is authentic Persian?	
	Food Portion	14	Are your food portions the same as what that can be found in Iran?	
Atmospheric authenticity	Scents	15	Have you ever thought of diffusing an authentic Persian scent in the air (e.g., burning Esfand)?	
General	Authenticity	16	Overall, what elements you think are important in an authentic Persian restaurant? What qualities do you think an authentic restaurant should have?	
General		17	Is there anything you would like to add?	

2. List of the Iranian Restaurants in London

Alborz	Bibigol	Iran (a)	Pardis	Saffron (b)
Alounak (a)	Boof	Iran (b)	Pars	Sama
Alounak (b)	Caspian	Iran Zamin	Patogh	Senator Lounge
Apadana	Caspian lounge	Kateh	Persian garden	Shah Abbas
Aquarium	Colbeh	Kish	Persian Kitchen	Simurgh
Arg	Del'ish	Kishmish	Persian nights	Sinuhe
Ariana	Diba (a)	Lavash	Persian palace	Sufi
Bamanoosh	Diba (b)	Little Persia	Piano	Tajrish
Behesht	Diyana's Persian grill	Loghmeh	Polow	Tandis
Behesht e Barin	Eram shashlik	Mahdi	Rendezvous	Tanoor
Belgrave	Faanoos	Miniature	Rice Persian Kitchen	Tehran
Beluga (1)	Farsi	Mirror palace	Rumi	Tilit
Beluga (2)	Gandom	Mohsen	Sadaf	Yas
Berenjak (a)	Hafez	Molana	Safa	
Berenjak (b)	Hana	Narenj	Saffron (a)	

3. Research Information sheet (Restaurateurs)



Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully, it will give you a brief overview of the research, and explain what participation means for you.

What is this research about?

You have been invited to take part in a PhD research study analysing the impact of sensory tools on authenticity within ethnic restaurants.

Who is doing the research?

The principal investigator for this research is Neda Sattarzadeh, a PhD student at the University of West London, London Geller College of Hospitality and Tourism.

If you have any further questions about the research or your potential participation, feel free to contact the researcher at 21380275@student.uwl.ac.uk or

Dr Amalia Tsiami at Amalia.Tsiami@uwl.ac.uk.

Who can take part?

All the managers/owners of Persian restaurants based in London.

What do you need to do?

First, the researcher will take some photos and videos of the restaurant and then you are kindly required to participate in an interview about your opinions and experiences. The interview will be recorded and the estimated time for the interview is 45-60 minutes.

What will happen to the information that you give and will everything you say be kept confidential?

The collected will be analysed to develop a PhD thesis. It is also anticipated that results will be presented at conferences and in published papers.

The study has received research ethics clearance by the University of West London. All information about you will be handled in strict confidence, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018). Data is only available to the researcher of the study. All data will be entirely anonymized, and that the identity of participants cannot be determined in any kind of publication or presentation.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Signature and date:

4. Data Management and Storage form



RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

DATA MANAGEMENT AND STORAGE STATEMENT

All applicants should familiarise themselves with the Data Protection Act 1998, and adhere to its principles in all aspects of their research:

<http://www.uwl.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Departments/About-us/Web/PDF/policies/policy-on-data-protection.pdf>

As a student or member of staff undertaking a research project, I understand that I am responsible for the following:

- The security and confidentiality of all data collected
- Mitigating all risks to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality posed by all kinds of personal information storage, processing, including computer and paper files, e-mail records, audio and video files, and any information that directly identifies an individual.

I will ensure that:

- Data and codes and all identifying information will be kept in separate locked filing cabinets/files and working files will contain no identifying information, and will only be accessed by one or two persons
- All audiotapes will be transcribed using codes or pseudonyms for identification of individuals and destroyed upon completion of the research project
- Access to computer files will be available by password only
- Data will be stored for up to 5 years after the end of the project, after which they should be disposed of safely.

Researcher name: Neda Sattarzadeh

Application ID: 21380275

Project title: The application of sensory tools in the creation of authenticity in ethnic restaurants – A study of Persian restaurants in London

5. Research consent form



Informed Consent Form

Title of the project: The application of sensory tools in the creation of authenticity in ethnic restaurants – A study of Persian restaurants in London.

Research Ethics Committee reference number: UWL/REC/SHT-00785

Name of the researcher: Neda Sattarzadeh

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and Data Management Form. You will be given a copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box I am consenting to this element of the study. And I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study, and by not giving consent for any one element I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

Tick Here

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the provided <i>Information Sheet</i> for the above study, dated DD/MM/YYYY.	
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and have asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
3. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.	
4. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained in the <i>Data Management Form</i> dated DD/MM/YYYY.	
5. I am aware that taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio or video).	
6. I agree to take part in this project.	

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

6. Interview guide (Diners)

Name of the interviewee:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">Code</div>
Age:	
Ethnicity:	
Years living in the UK:	
Gender:	
Date and time of the interview:	

	No	Question	Done
Background information & Familiarity & Previous experience	1	To begin please talk a little about yourself.	
	2	How familiar you are with the concept of Persian hospitality?	
	3	Have you been to a Persian restaurant before? (If yes: can you tell me about your experience? / If no: why?)	
Authenticity	4	What is your definition of authenticity in regard to ethnic restaurants?	
	5	To what degree authenticity matters to you if you decide to dine in a Persian restaurant?	
Authenticity & Sensory Strategies	6	Imagine you want to dine in a Persian restaurant, what elements would make you perceive that restaurant as authentic? OR What are your expectations of an authentic Persian restaurant?	
	7	How should an authentic Persian restaurant look like? Why? OR To what degree visual elements matter in a Persian restaurant to be authentic? Why?	
	8	How would seeing a clay oven (Tanoor) or the charcoal grill (Manghal) in a Persian restaurant, would make you feel?	
	9	What kind of music do you expect to hear in an authentic Persian restaurant? why?	
	10	In your opinion, what makes a menu authentic in a Persian restaurant? (e.g., food items, language, food names, design, etc.)	
	11	How does the food in an authentic Persian restaurant should be? - What about how it is served? - What about the portion?	
	12	Would it matter to you if a Persian restaurant offer non-Persian food items in their menu?	
	13	Would it make any difference to you if the restaurant staff are Persian or not?	
General	14	Is there anything else you would like to add?	

7. Example of an interview transcript

[NI4 - Transcription.docx](#)

8. Research information sheet (Diners)



Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully, it will give you a brief overview of the research, and explain what participation means for you.

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If you have any further questions about the research or your potential participation, feel free to contact the researcher at 21380275@student.uwl.ac.uk or

Dr Amalia Tsiami at Amalia.Tsiami@uwl.ac.uk.

Who can take part?

All London residents over the age of 18.

What do you need to do?

You are kindly required to participate in an interview about your opinions and experiences. The interview will be recorded and the estimated time for the interview is 45-60 minutes.

What will happen to the information that you give and will everything you say be kept confidential?

The data which is collected from the interview will be analysed to develop a PhD thesis. It is also anticipated that results will be presented at conferences and in published papers.

The study has received research ethics clearance by the University of West London.

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What if you change your mind about taking part?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Signature and date:

9. Research Outputs

Sattarzadeh, N., Tsiami, A., Maxim, C. and Iordanova, E. 2023. Awareness and perceptions of ethnic restaurant managers towards authenticity and sensory strategies—A case study of Persian ethnic restaurants in London. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, p.100679.

Sattarzadeh, N., Tsiami, A., Maxim, C. and Iordanova, E. 2023. The tea is on the house! Cultural Insights and Their Impact on the Provision of Hospitality in Ethnic Restaurants -A Case Study of Iranian Ethnic Restaurants in London. In: *Stockholm Gastronomy Conference 2023, 22-25 November 2023, Stockholm, Sweden*

Sattarzadeh, N., Tsiami, A., Maxim, C. and Iordanova, E. 2022. 5 Senses at the Dining Table –A systematic literature review of human five senses within dining settings. In: *12th International Conference on Culinary Arts and Sciences 2022, 1-3 June 2022, Lyon, France*

Sattarzadeh, N., Tsiami, A., Maxim, C. and Iordanova, E. 2022. Awareness and Perceptions of Ethnic Restaurant Managers towards Authenticity and Sensory Strategies - A case study of Persian Ethnic Restaurants in London. In: *12th International Conference on Culinary Arts and Sciences 2022, 1-3 June 2022, Lyon, France*