

## Customer Experience in Culinary Business: A Bibliometric Analysis of Trends and Themes

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the research landscape of customer experience in the culinary industry focusing on restaurants and bakeries through a bibliometric analysis of 149 Scopus-indexed publications from 1999 to 2025 using VOSviewer. The findings highlight five key research themes: emotional engagement, consumption behavior, service quality, digital technology, and service innovation via robotics. Emerging topics include authenticity, fast-food contexts, and service automation, reflecting evolving customer expectations driven by digital transformation. The United States, United Kingdom, China, and several Asian countries are identified as central hubs in knowledge production and collaboration. This study provides a comprehensive mapping of scholarly trends and suggests future research directions, including AI integration, authenticity perception, and localized customer experience strategies for culinary businesses in developing regions.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's increasingly competitive business environment, customer experience (CX) has emerged as a strategic priority, especially in the culinary sector such as restaurants and bakeries. CX extends beyond product and service quality to include emotional, social, and perceived value dimensions. Bonfanti et al. (2023) stress the urgency of managing customer experience post-COVID-19 to build sustainable competitive advantage.

Physical ambiance and sensory elements have been shown to shape consumer responses (Gawaran et al., 2023), while digital tools like sentiment analysis enable real-time insights into customer satisfaction (Acar et al., 2024). Despite such advancements, many culinary businesses still rely heavily on intuition rather than data in crafting CX strategies. This gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation reveals a disconnect that hinders optimal customer engagement.

Additionally, although CX research has expanded rapidly especially after 2018 with contributions from marketing, psychology, and service management (Gallardo-García et al., 2022), several critical research gaps remain. First, much of the literature is heavily concentrated in developed economies, with limited insights from developing regions where culinary businesses operate under distinct consumer expectations and resource constraints. Second, while many studies explore general service industries, fewer focus specifically on the micro-level dynamics of CX in restaurants and bakeries, where customer interactions are often more personal and context-dependent. Third, emerging technological themes such as AI, robotics, and automation are gaining attention, but there is limited systematic synthesis of how these elements integrate into CX frameworks in the culinary domain.

Furthermore, existing reviews tend to be narrative or conceptual in nature, lacking comprehensive quantitative mapping of the intellectual structure of CX research. As Donthu et al. (2021) emphasize, bibliometric methods can fill this void by providing objective insights into the evolution of research themes, collaboration patterns, and influential publications.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis of 149 Scopus-indexed articles published between 1999 and 2025 to explore the trends, dominant themes, and theoretical contributions in customer experience research with a specific focus on the culinary industry. Using tools such as VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010), the study maps keyword linkages, identifies emerging clusters, and highlights underexplored areas, particularly in developing countries.

This study aims to investigate the evolving trends and thematic directions of customer experience research within the culinary industry, focusing particularly on restaurant and bakery sectors in recent years. It also seeks to identify the dominant themes and theoretical contributions that have emerged globally. By examining the structure and development of the existing literature, this study is expected to provide new insights and open pathways for developing relevant and evidence-based customer experience strategies. These efforts align with the findings of Seyitoğlu et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of a

multidimensional understanding of customer experience as a basis for service innovation and enhancing the quality of customer interaction in restaurant settings.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

The concept of customer experience (CX) has evolved into a strategic imperative for businesses in the culinary sector, extending beyond the traditional focus on product quality to encompass emotional, sensory, and digital dimensions. Bonfanti et al. (2023) emphasize that CX management has become central in building sustainable competitive advantage, particularly in post-pandemic contexts where customer expectations have shifted dramatically. In restaurant and bakery settings, creating a holistic customer journey is now seen as a critical success factor.

Recent literature indicates a significant shift in academic attention toward CX since 2018, with research priorities expanding to include real-time engagement, emotional satisfaction, and technological integration. The bibliometric analysis reveals five dominant thematic clusters: emotional engagement, consumption behavior, service quality, digital innovation (e.g., sentiment analysis), and robotics-based service solutions (Seyitoğlu et al., 2025; Gallardo-García et al., 2022). These themes reflect a growing recognition of CX as a multidimensional phenomenon with implications for business innovation and customer loyalty.

Drawing from the frameworks of Lemon & Verhoef (2016), CX is shaped by a combination of contextual stimuli including physical environments and brand communication, and internal customer responses along cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Hussain et al. (2021) further highlight the role of co-creation experiences in fostering emotional bonds and enhancing repurchase intentions, particularly within the food and beverage sector.

The digitalization of the culinary industry has spurred the adoption of data-driven strategies to personalize customer interactions and streamline service delivery. Studies by Acar et al. (2024) and Gawaran et al. (2023) illustrate the rising influence of machine learning, online review analysis, and service robots in enriching customer engagement. In fast-service restaurant settings, Amiri et al. (2025) find that consumer readiness for technology plays a critical role in the acceptance of automated solutions such as self-service kiosks.

Cultural and societal values are increasingly recognized as shaping customer experience, especially in emerging markets. Patrisia et al. (2025) demonstrate that health consciousness and halal literacy significantly influence consumer decisions in Muslim-majority regions. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al. (2023) argue that perceived authenticity and experiential value are key in creating memorable experiences that resonate with local identity and traditions.

In summary, the literature and theoretical foundations are presented in a clear and structured manner to enable synthesis across emotional, technological, and cultural dimensions. This synthesis supports the construction of the bibliometric framework and guides the formulation of research propositions to be explored

in the mapping analysis. The following propositions are proposed based on observed patterns in the literature:

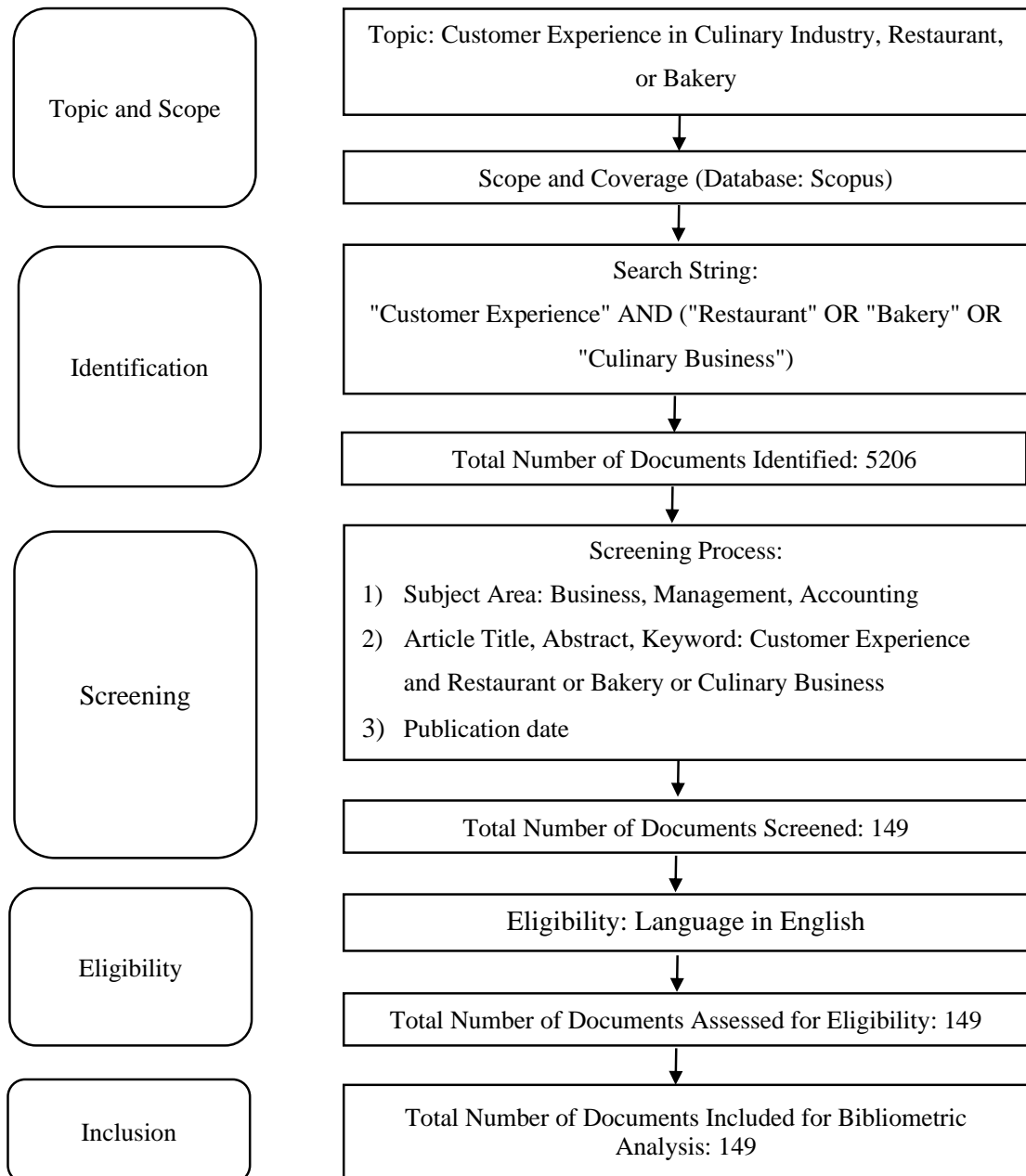
- **P1:** The volume of publications on customer experience in the culinary sector has increased significantly since 2018.
- **P2:** Emotional engagement, service quality, and digital innovation are the most frequently addressed themes in CX research within the culinary domain.
- **P3:** Topics such as service robotics, authenticity, and halal literacy have emerged as new areas of interest in recent years.
- **P4:** Asia and North America are leading in terms of publication output and international collaboration on CX in culinary contexts.
- **P5:** Bibliometric network analysis reveals an increasing trend in cross-institutional and cross-country research collaboration over time.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a descriptive bibliometric approach to map the trends, developments, and key themes in the scientific literature concerning customer experience within the context of culinary businesses, specifically restaurants and bakeries. The bibliometric method is chosen for its strength in providing a systematic and comprehensive overview of scientific knowledge production over time, as well as in revealing the intellectual structure and evolving discourse within a research domain (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021).

To ensure a rigorous data collection process, this study adopts the four-step procedure proposed by Page et al. (2021), which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, relevant keywords were entered into the Scopus database using the search string: "Customer Experience" AND ("Restaurant" OR "Bakery" OR "Culinary Business"). This search initially yielded 5,206 publications. The screening stage involved selecting only those documents that were published within the subject area of Business, Management, and Accounting and were related to customer experience in the culinary sector based on their titles and abstracts. Non-research articles such as editorials, book chapters, and conference proceedings were excluded, resulting in 149 documents that met the criteria.

The eligibility stage focused on language refinement, where only articles published in English were retained to maintain analytical consistency. No additional documents were excluded, so the total remained at 149 publications. These were then included in the final analysis. The bibliometric data were analyzed using VOSviewer software, which enables visual mapping of co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic clusters. The resulting maps provide insights into the intellectual structure of the field, highlighting dominant research themes and potential gaps for further investigation.



**Figure 1. Data Collection Process**

Through this methodological design, the study aims to uncover not only temporal publication patterns but also thematic evolutions and collaborative trends in customer experience research within the culinary industry. The findings are expected to contribute a foundational understanding that can inform academic inquiry and practical strategy development in hospitality and food service businesses adapting to digital transformation and evolving customer expectations (Donthu et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance Analysis

Based on the data retrieved from the Scopus database using the keyword combination "Customer Experience" AND ("Restaurant" OR "Bakery" OR "Culinary Business"), a total of 149 relevant articles published between 1999 and 2025 were identified after the eligibility screening process.

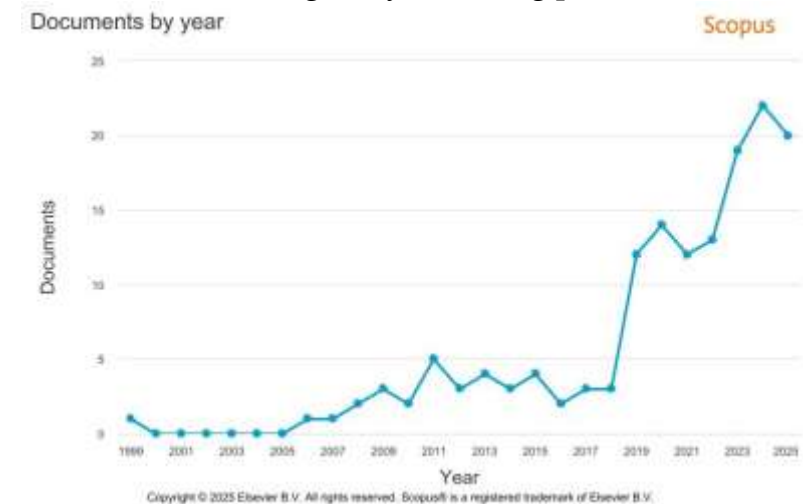


Figure 2. Publications Trends

The analysis of annual publication trends reveals a consistent growth in the number of studies related to customer experience in the culinary business sector, including restaurants and bakeries. During the early period (2006–2017), the number of publications remained relatively low. However, from 2018 to 2024, a significant increase was observed, indicating growing academic interest in the importance of customer experience as a means to build competitive advantage in this industry. The peak in publications occurred in 2024, aligning with the widespread adoption of digital technologies and shifting consumer behavior in the post-COVID-19 era.

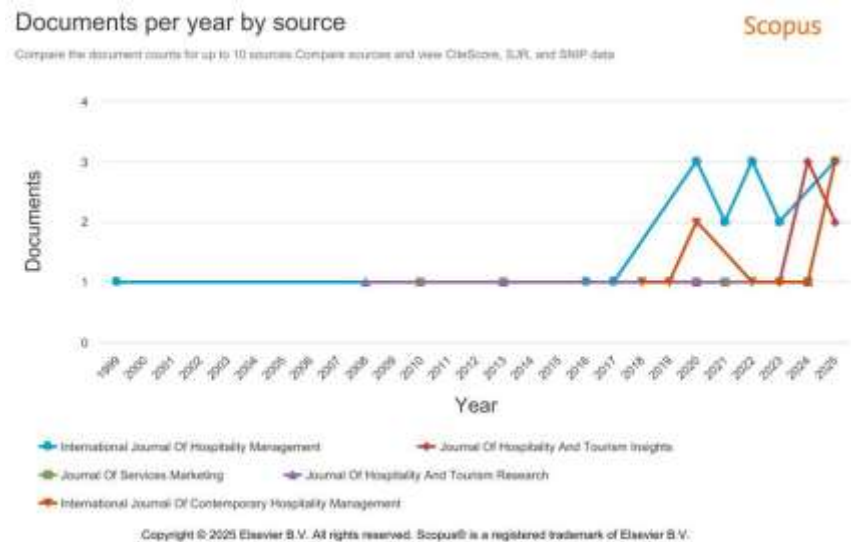


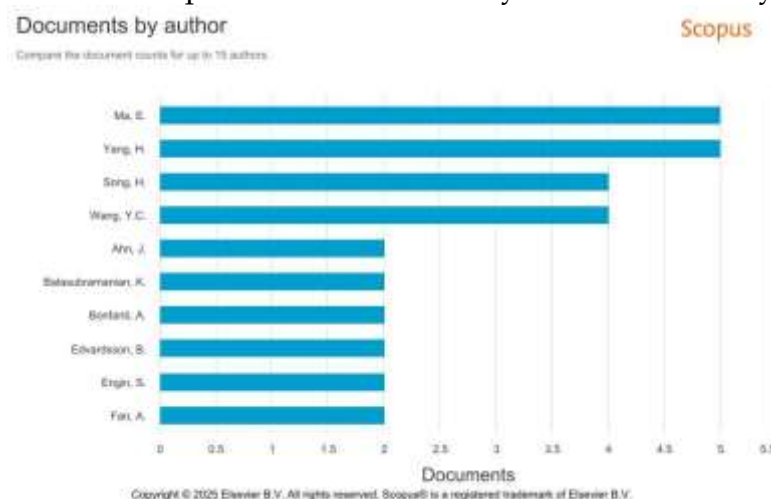
Figure 3. Journal Source Trends

Based on data from Scopus, the trend of scientific publications in the culinary business sector particularly in restaurants and bakeries has shown a

significant increase in recent years. The displayed graph reflects the number of documents published per year from various leading journals between 1999 and 2025. The three journals with the most consistent and significant contributions to the number of publications are the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, and the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. The *International Journal of Hospitality Management* has recorded a rapid increase since 2017, with a peak of three publications per year in 2020 and 2022, highlighting its central role in advancing knowledge in the culinary business field.

Meanwhile, the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights* began to show growth in 2020 and experienced a surge during the 2023–2025 period, peaking at three documents in 2025. A similar pattern was observed in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, which also reached its highest contribution in the same year. On the other hand, journals such as the *Journal of Services Marketing* and the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* showed only sporadic contributions, with one document published in select years, indicating that these journals may be less focused on current issues in the culinary business industry.

These findings suggest a growing academic interest in topics related to customer experience, service innovation, and digital transformation within the restaurant and bakery sectors. The year 2025 appears to be a particularly active period for publications, reflecting the relevance and urgency of research in this area. As such, the aforementioned leading journals serve as key references for researchers seeking to contribute to the development of scholarly and practical insights into customer experience in the culinary business industry.

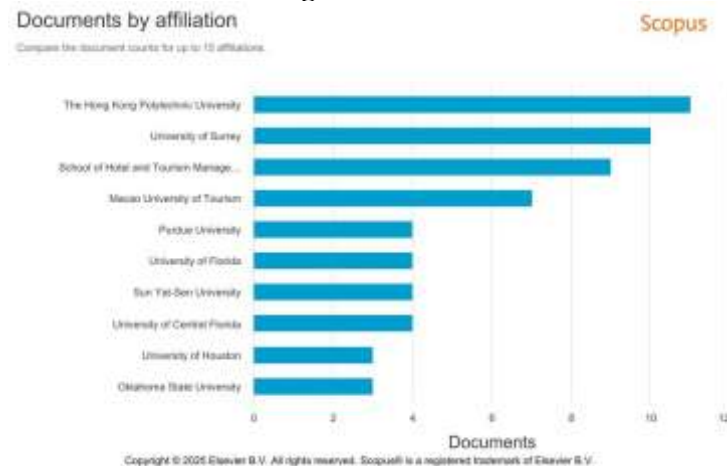


**Figure 4. Documents by Author**

The analysis of author productivity reveals that Ma, E. and Yang, H. are the most prolific contributors in this field, with five academic publications each listed in Scopus. They are followed by Song, H. and Wang, Y.C., who have also made significant contributions with four documents each. Beyond this core group, several authors such as Ahn, J., Bonfanti, A., and Edvardsson, B. have published two papers each, enriching the diversity of perspectives in the

development of theories and practices related to customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries.

This concentration of publications indicates that, although the field is growing, there are key figures who play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of research. Identifying these leading authors is essential for new researchers to understand the centers of knowledge and to build relevant academic networks.

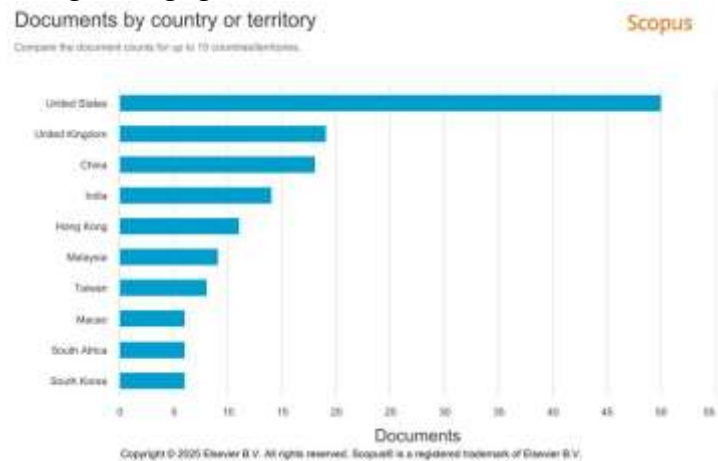


**Figure 5. Top Contributing Institutions in Publications**

The analysis based on institutional affiliations shows that The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is the leading institution in terms of publication output, with a total of 11 documents focusing on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries.

It is followed by the University of Surrey and the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, which consistently produce high-quality research. The dominance of institutions from Asia particularly from Hong Kong and Macau, indicates that this region has become a global center of excellence in hospitality studies. Meanwhile, several prominent universities from the United States, such as Purdue University, the University of Florida, and the University of Central Florida, have also made significant contributions.

This pattern highlights the presence of strategic research hubs that serve as important references and collaboration opportunities for academics and practitioners aiming to engage in international-level research.

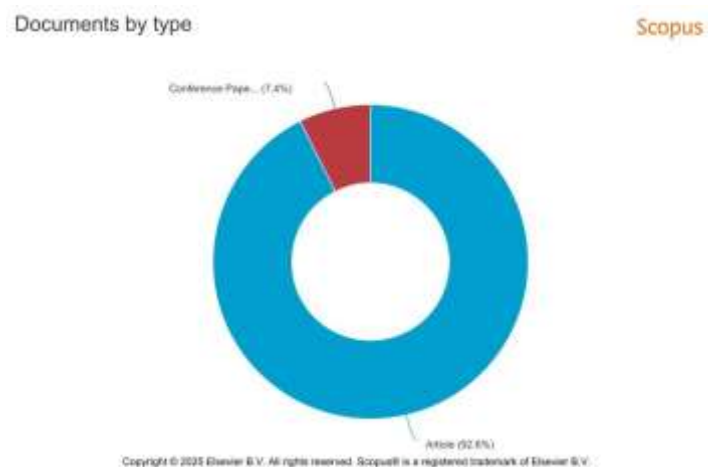


**Figure 6. Publication Distribution by Country**



The analysis based on countries or regions reveals that the United States dominates scientific publications on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries, with approximately 50 documents. This leading position underscores America's central role as a global knowledge hub, supported by well-established research infrastructure and an extensive academic network. Following the U.S., the United Kingdom and China each recorded around 20 documents, indicating substantial contributions from both countries. The UK is renowned as a pioneer in management and tourism studies, while China has shown rapid progress over the past decade by strengthening of university research capacities.

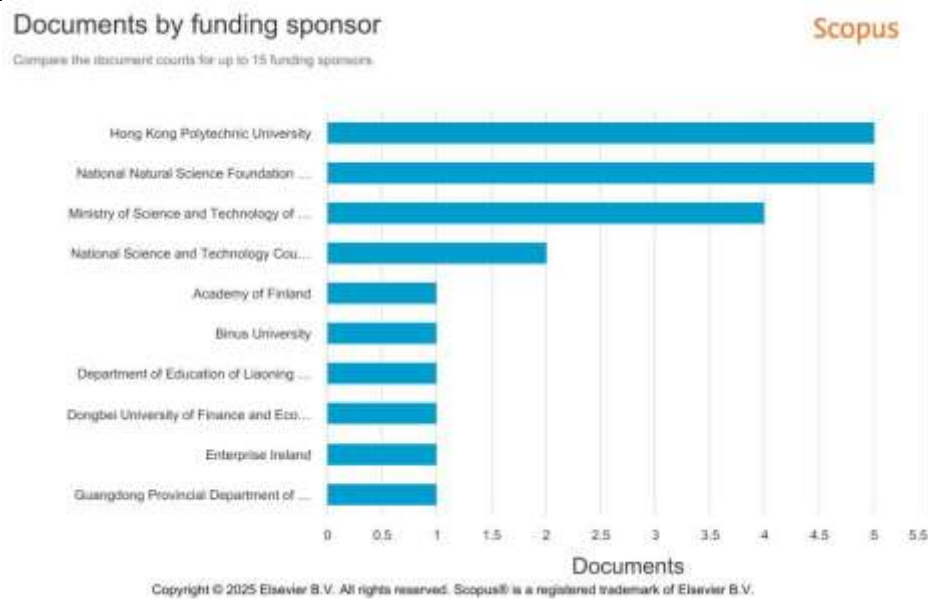
Other Asian countries such as India, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Macao, and South Korea also rank among the top ten, reflecting growing interest and investment in research across the region. The presence of areas like Hong Kong and Macao also previously identified as highly productive institutional affiliations, further confirms Asia's growing role as a key player in the global hospitality research landscape. Meanwhile, South Africa also appears on the list, marking an initial contribution from the African continent, albeit on a relatively smaller scale. These findings reinforce the notion that the production of scholarly literature on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery sectors is no longer concentrated in the West, but has grown into a more global and inclusive field.



**Figure 7. Document Type Distribution in Publications**

The analysis of document types shows that the majority of scientific publications on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries are journal articles, accounting for 92.6% of all documents indexed in Scopus. Meanwhile, only 7.4% originate from conference papers. This finding indicates that academic studies in this field tend to be more formalized and disseminated through peer-reviewed journal channels rather than conference forums. It also reflects the high expectations for theoretical quality and contribution within this research area. The dominance of journal articles reinforces the importance of academic publications as the primary medium for

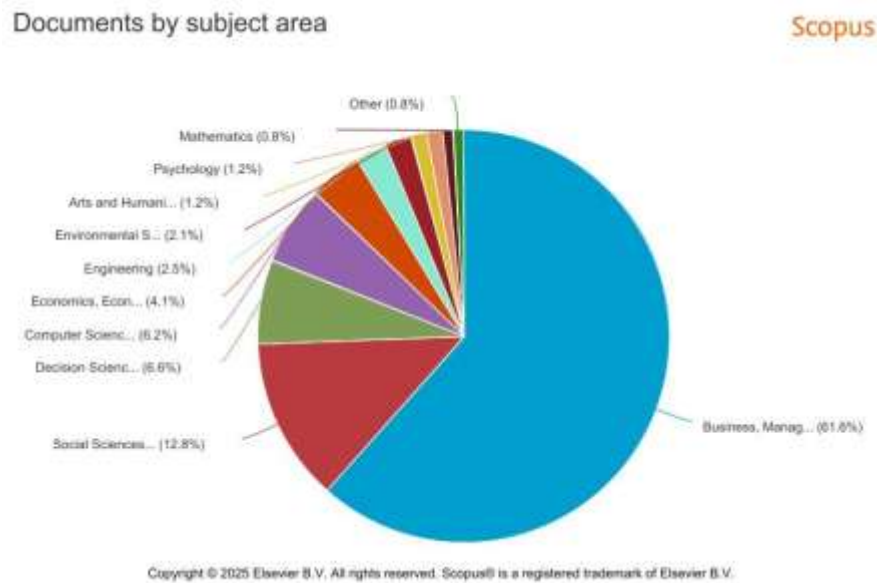
disseminating scientific knowledge in hospitality management, while also serving as a credible reference for future research development.



**Figure 8. Top Funding Institutions in Research**

In terms of funding sources, research on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries is largely supported by institutions from Asia, particularly those based in Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, and the Ministry of Science and Technology of Taiwan are noted as the main funders, each supporting around five academic documents. This strong backing reflects the strategic commitment of the Asian region to advancing research focused on the culinary, restaurant, and bakery sectors as part of broader economic development and service innovation efforts.

In addition, other institutions such as the National Science and Technology Council (Taiwan) and the Academy of Finland have also made notable contributions. Interestingly, Binus University from Indonesia is also listed as a funding source, indicating that higher education institutions in Southeast Asia are beginning to take a more active role in promoting research in this field. These findings highlight the importance of research funding as a key driver in enriching global academic contributions and in building a sustainable research ecosystem.

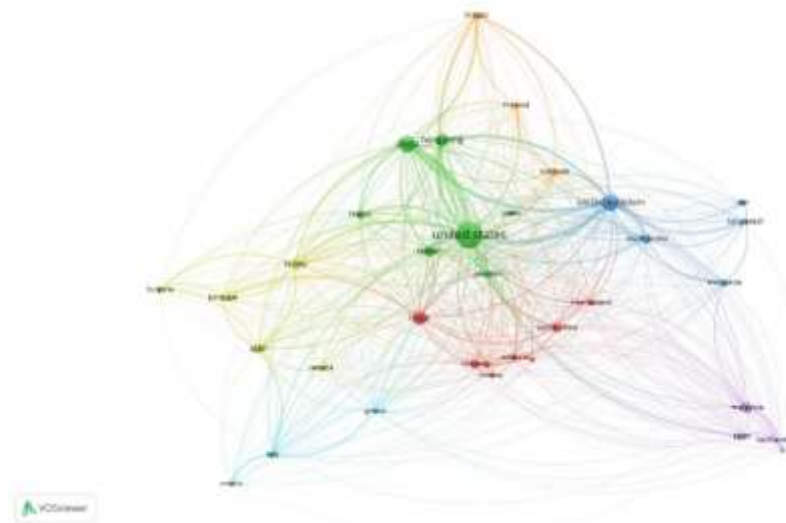


**Figure 9. Distribution of Publications by Field of Study**

The distribution of documents by subject area shows that the majority of publications on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries are concentrated in the field of Business, Management, and Accounting, which accounts for 61.6% of all analyzed documents. This reflects the dominance of managerial and business-oriented approaches in the development of both theory and practice within this industry. This is followed by Social Sciences at 12.8%, as well as Decision Sciences (6.6%) and Computer Science (6.2%), indicating a growing interest in interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate data and technology in studying customer experience, consumer behavior, and operational efficiency.

Other fields such as Economics, Engineering, Environmental Science, Psychology, and Arts and Humanities also contribute on a smaller scale, yet remain relevant. These contributions show that customer experience research in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery sectors is not only practical in nature but also engages with social, cultural, and sustainability dimensions. These findings reinforce that while management science remains the foundation, hospitality research is evolving into a complex and dynamic multidisciplinary field.

### Science Mapping

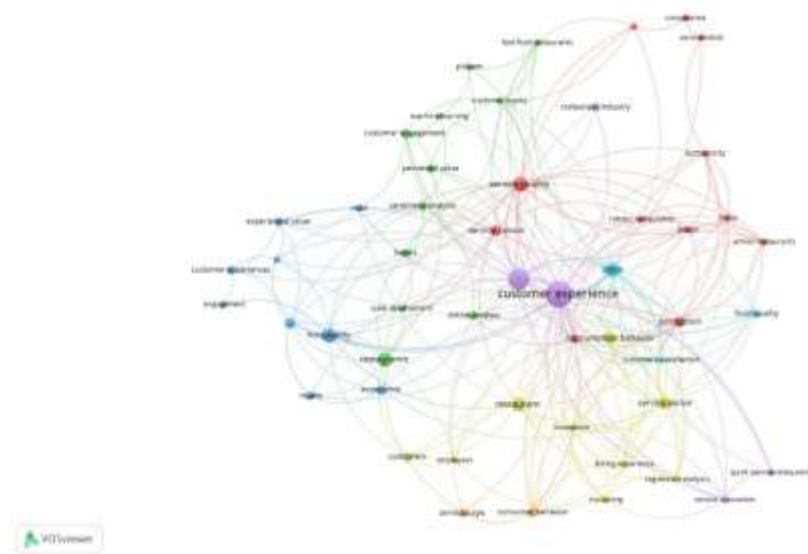


**Figure 10. Collaboration Between Countries**

The visualization of international collaboration using VOSviewer reveals that the United States is the dominant actor in the global scientific publication network related to customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries. The country not only produces the highest number of publications but also maintains extensive collaborative ties with various countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa. The United Kingdom and China also serve as key nodes within this network, reflecting their active roles in knowledge production and international research cooperation.

Meanwhile, several Asian countries such as India, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Indonesia have shown significant growth in research collaboration in recent years. Their increasing number of connections and more integrated positions within the network suggest that their contributions are becoming more progressive and contemporary. These findings indicate a shift in global research dynamics from a dominance by Western countries toward a more geographically balanced participation, particularly from the rapidly developing academic landscape in Asia.

This visual map not only illustrates the structure of global scientific collaboration but also highlights opportunities for cross-country partnerships to enrich multidisciplinary approaches in the study of customer experience within the culinary, restaurant, and bakery sectors.



**Figure 11. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network on Customer Experience in the Culinary Industry**

The keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer reveals a complex yet well-organized thematic structure within the literature on customer experience. The visualization identifies five major clusters, each representing a distinct but complementary research direction.

**Cluster 1: Core Customer Experience and Business Impact**

This cluster positions *customer experience* at the center of the research network, highlighting strong associations with topics such as *consumption behavior*, *service sector*, *marketing*, and *sales*. It shows that customer experience is not only viewed as a psychological phenomenon but also has direct implications for consumer behavior and business performance.

**Cluster 2: Emotional and Relational Dimensions in Hospitality**

This cluster emphasizes the emotional and relational aspects of customer experience within hospitality and restaurant services. Keywords such as *loyalty*, *engagement*, and *experiential value* suggest that studies in this group focus on how positive experiences foster customer attachment and long-term loyalty.

**Cluster 3: Data-Driven and Technological Approaches**

This cluster takes a more technical and data-oriented perspective. Topics like *machine learning*, *sentiment analysis*, and *online reviews* illustrate the trend of using technology and big data to measure and interpret customer perceptions in real-time. Analytical methods such as *PLS-SEM* also underscore the growing importance of quantitative techniques in validating customer experience models.

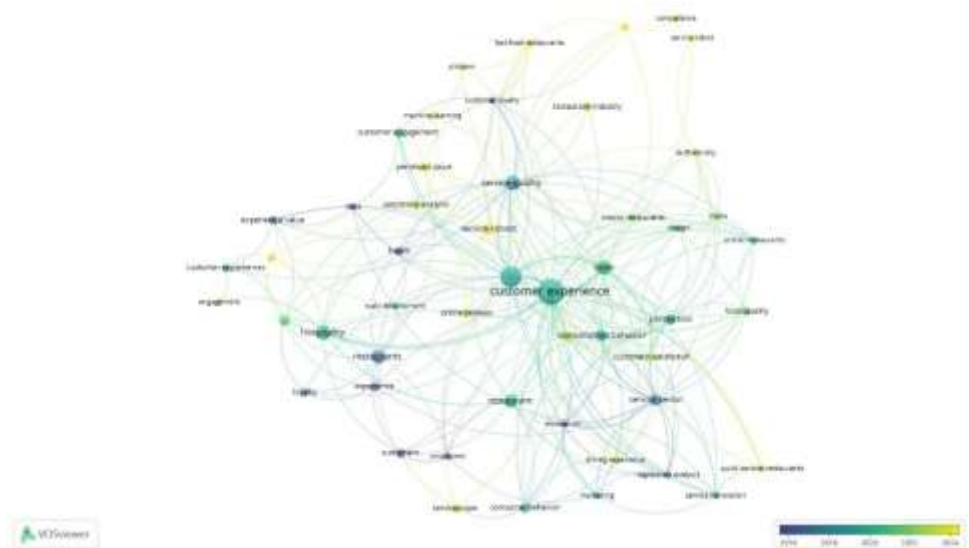
**Cluster 4: Service Automation and Technological Innovation**

This cluster reflects emerging research on technology-driven services, particularly involving *service robots*, *robotic restaurants*, and *authenticity*. Research here tends to explore how automation and service design influence customer perceptions, especially in fast-food and ethnic restaurant settings.

**Cluster 5: Service Innovation and Physical Environment (Servicescape)**

This cluster focuses on *service innovation* and *consumer behavior* within the context of the physical service environment, or *servicescape*. The presence of analytical methods like *regression analysis* indicates quantitative efforts to examine how environmental and innovative factors impact customer satisfaction and decision-making.

Overall, this visualization confirms that research on customer experience in the hospitality and restaurant industries is evolving into a highly multidisciplinary field. Behavioral, strategic, technological, design-oriented, and environmental approaches converge to show that customer experience is not merely a marketing issue, but rather an intersection of psychology, technology, and service management. These insights provide a valuable starting point for identifying research gaps and developing more adaptive service models in response to the evolving dynamics of today’s consumers.



**Figure 12. Temporal Evolution of Research Themes on Customer Experience in the Culinary Business**

The overlay visualization generated using VOSviewer illustrates the temporal dynamics of research theme development in the study of customer experience, particularly in the hospitality and restaurant sectors. This visualization uses a color scale ranging from earlier years (e.g., around 2016) to more recent ones (e.g., around 2024), indicating when specific keywords began to gain prominence in the literature. The node “customer experience” remains the central theme in the network, showing strong linkages to concepts such as *consumption behavior*, *service quality*, *customer satisfaction*, and *restaurants* demonstrating the sustained relevance of these topics as foundational elements over nearly a decade.

Emerging research trends can be identified through more recently introduced keywords such as *service robot*, *authenticity*, *fast-food restaurants*, and *experiential value*. These terms reflect a growing academic focus in recent years on service automation, authentic experiences, and the fast-food segment. This shift suggests a scholarly response to real-world transformations in the service



industry, including the integration of technology and changing consumer preferences toward more personalized and efficient experiences.

Meanwhile, foundational themes such as *hospitality*, *customer loyalty*, and *scale development* are associated with earlier periods of research activity. These topics played a key role in shaping the initial conceptual frameworks and measurement models for customer experience and continue to influence contemporary discussions.

Overall, this overlay visualization provides a clear depiction of how research on customer experience has evolved from early efforts focused on conceptual understanding and satisfaction measurement, to more adaptive approaches that engage with technological innovation and shifting consumer behavior. The results demonstrate that this body of literature is far from static; instead, it continues to evolve in response to industry transformation and the increasingly complex, digital demands of modern customers. This visualization also serves as a strategic tool to identify emerging research areas with potential for further exploration in both academic and managerial contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to map the trends, key themes, and developmental directions of the literature on customer experience in the culinary, restaurant, and bakery industries using a bibliometric approach based on Scopus data. Based on 149 selected publications analyzed with the VOSviewer tool, the findings indicate a sharp increase in the number of publications since 2018, reflecting growing attention to the importance of customer experience in building competitive advantage. The visualization results reveal five major thematic clusters, covering emotional dimensions, consumption behavior, service quality, digital technology, and design- and robotics-based innovation.

In addition, the overlay visualization shows that newer themes such as authenticity, fast-food restaurants, and service robots have gained increasing relevance in recent years, in line with shifts in industry landscapes and customer behavior. The dominance of publications from institutions in Asia and America, along with diverse international collaborations, indicates that the issue of customer experience is no longer Western-centric but has become a globally inclusive agenda.

Thus, this study not only provides a comprehensive overview of the current scientific landscape but also opens opportunities for further exploration of more applied and responsive studies aligned with the needs of modern consumers in the digital era.

Based on the findings, this study recommends that future research deepen the exploration of AI integration, digital service personalization, and the role of authenticity in shaping customer experience especially within culinary businesses in developing countries. Practitioners are encouraged to adopt data-driven and emotionally engaging approaches, while institutions and policymakers should support capacity building for small businesses to enhance CX strategies.

This study is limited to Scopus-indexed publications and relies solely on bibliometric tools without qualitative content analysis, which may exclude

relevant insights from non-indexed sources or grey literature. Additionally, the focus on publication metadata does not fully capture the theoretical depth of each contribution. Future research should consider combining bibliometric mapping with systematic reviews or qualitative synthesis to uncover nuanced conceptual frameworks. Further studies may also explore cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal tracking of CX innovation in SMEs, or the empirical testing of CX models in specific culinary business contexts.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

Given the findings from the bibliometric analysis on customer experience in the culinary business, future research could delve deeper into the relationship between digital transformation and customer satisfaction. With the increasing adoption of technologies such as online reservation systems, digital menus, and AI-driven customer feedback tools, there is a growing need to understand how these innovations affect the emotional and behavioral responses of customers. Researchers could explore how different demographic segments respond to these digital enhancements and whether technology contributes to a more personalized dining experience or detracts from traditional service values.

In addition, further studies could examine the influence of cultural context on customer experience management within culinary businesses. Since food consumption is deeply embedded in cultural practices, comparative studies across countries or regions could reveal how cultural values shape customer expectations, perceptions of service quality, and loyalty behaviors. Investigating local versus global brand strategies in delivering customer experience would also provide valuable insights into effective positioning and service personalization in diverse culinary markets.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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