

Increasing Entertainment Among Customer in A Restaurant Through Board Game Design

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ABSTRACT

Extended waiting times for food in restaurants often contribute to customer dissatisfaction, primarily due to feelings of boredom and a lack of engaging stimulus. This study explores an innovative approach to enhancing the dining experience by integrating board games as a form of interactive entertainment during waiting periods. The primary objectives are to identify types of board games that are suitable for restaurant settings and to determine the key elements that make these games effective as interactive tools within a dining context. Employing a mixed-methods research design, this study combines quantitative data collected through customer surveys with qualitative insights gathered from semi-structured interviews involving restaurant patrons and the restaurant owner. The findings reveal that the presence of board games significantly reduces customer perceived waiting time, fosters social interaction, and enhances the overall dining environment. Customers reported feeling more relaxed, engaged, and satisfied with their dining experience when given the opportunity to play games while waiting. From the restaurant's perspective, this strategy functions as an indirect method of "buying time," allowing food to be prepared at its usual pace without compromising service quality. Moreover, the implementation of board games appears to encourage longer stays and repeat visits, contributing positively to the restaurant's business value. Overall, this study concludes that the integration of board games offers a cost-effective and impactful solution for improving customer satisfaction, enriching the social environment, and redefining waiting time as a meaningful and enjoyable part of the dining experience.

Keywords: customer experience, board games, waiting time, social interaction, dining satisfaction, service innovation.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Design in the restaurant industry goes beyond aesthetics, it shapes customer experience,

engagement, and satisfaction. One innovative approach gaining traction is the integration of board games as interactive entertainment. Board games not only reduce boredom during waiting times but also foster social interaction, making dining more engaging and memorable (Zagal et al., 2006; McGonigal, 2011). By enhancing ambiance and interactivity, they contribute to a holistic experience that modern diners increasingly value alongside food and service quality (Mao & Dai, 2018). Incorporating board games can also serve strategic purposes: extending customer stay, increasing add on sales, and reinforcing brand identity, particularly when games are culturally or thematically aligned with the restaurant (Kim et al., 2020). Furthermore, such experiences foster emotional engagement, brand loyalty, and community building, especially through events like game nights or collaborations with local game designers.

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of board games in enhancing customer experience within restaurant settings, examining their role in promoting interaction, reducing perceived waiting times, and supporting business growth through strategic differentiation.

2 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The food industry is among the fastest-growing global sectors, with Malaysia experiencing similar trends. Previous research has predominantly emphasized service quality as the primary determinant of customer satisfaction, particularly in Western contexts (Bougoure & Neu, 2010). In contrast, studies in Eastern nations highlight the role of cultural and consumer preference differences in shaping customer perceptions (Qin, Prybutok, & Zhao, 2010). In Malaysia, scholars such as Azudin and Karaim (1988) and Noor (2006) confirm that customer satisfaction remains a critical factor in restaurant success.

In this study, 52.5% of 40 respondents identified service-related issues, especially long waiting times and delays in food preparation, as the most pressing concern. These inefficiencies significantly affect customer retention (Qin & Prybutok, 2009). Meanwhile, 15% expressed dissatisfaction with food quality, citing inconsistent taste and poor presentation (Kivela et al., 1999; Johns & Howard, 1998). Although only 2.5% of respondents criticized staff performance, maintaining high standards of professionalism remains essential (Gilbert et al., 2004; Lee & Ulgado, 1997).

To address these challenges, the study recommends staff training, menu refinement, and the integration of entertainment elements such as board games to reduce customer boredom (Zagal, Rick, & Hsi, 2006). Such interactive additions foster social engagement and enhance the overall dining experience, offering restaurants a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace.



Figure 1 Service and Quality

3 OBJECTIVES

- a. To explore the type of board games that are suitable while waiting for food and drinks in a restaurant.
- b. To identify the best elements of board games as interactive activities that are suitable for restaurants.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores literature related to board game integration in restaurants, using sources from Science Direct, Google Scholar, Sci-Hub, ResearchGate, EZaccess UiTM, and reputable online publications (Rollins, 2020). The review focuses on two areas: essential game design elements and the suitability of board games in enhancing restaurant experiences. Key game features include player interaction, clear rules, balanced difficulty, and excitement (Beltrami, 2020). Rollins (2020) adds that effective games should offer interactivity, clarity, and enjoyment. For restaurants, games must be compact, easy to understand, and playable in short durations (Smith & Taylor, 2019).

Surprise and novelty increase engagement, making dining more enjoyable (Johnson, 2021). Well-selected games foster social interaction, reduce boredom, and promote repeat visits (Lee & Wong, 2018). Beltrami (2020) emphasizes that cohesive mechanics, themes, and components lead to meaningful play. Input from customers, owners, and designers confirms that suitable games should be simple, quick, and space-efficient (Brown, 2022). Board games also promote communication, reduce stress, and enhance cognitive functions (Anderson & Kim, 2017; Bucks County Free Library, 2019). Themed restaurants can match games with décor for example, Go in Japanese settings (Puspita, 2015; Johnson, 2021).

Finally, games offer branding potential. Unique experiences encourage social media sharing and customer loyalty (Lee & Wong, 2018). Thus, board games serve as both entertainment and strategic business tools.

4.1 Customer Engagement in the Restaurant Industry

Customer engagement is essential in building strong brand relationships in the restaurant industry. While satisfaction is important, it does not always lead to loyalty (Bennett & Rundle Thiele, 2004). Engagement and trust foster emotional connections, repeat visits, and advocacy (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Dining contexts vary dinner settings emphasize social experiences, while lunch focuses on speed and value (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004). Personalized service, ambiance, and technology like mobile ordering can enhance engagement (Pantano & Viassone, 2015). By addressing both emotional and functional needs, restaurants can build lasting customer relationships and stay competitive (Hollebeek, 2011)

4.2 The Role of Entertainment in Dining Experiences

Entertainment and sensory experiences significantly influence customer satisfaction and behavior in restaurants. Sensory brand experiences such as color, layout, music, and interior design shape emotional responses and brand perceptions (Chang & Cheng, 2023; Omar et al., 2015; Bitner, 1992). Warm colors stimulate appetite, while music sets the mood and affects dining duration (Singh, 2006; North & Hargreaves, 1998). Aesthetic design and layout enhance comfort and loyalty (Ryu & Jang, 2008). However, sensory appeal alone is insufficient food quality and service remain critical (Ibraheem & Oseni, 2022). A balanced, holistic strategy strengthens brand identity, encourages repeat visits, and improves competitiveness in the dining industry.

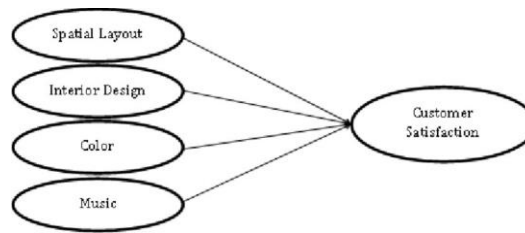


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework. Source: Adapted from Kasapila (2006), Namkung & Jang (2008), Jang & Liu (2008), Jang & Ha (2009) and Chen & Hu (2010)

4.3 Board Game Design Principles

Effective board game design integrates themes and mechanics, ensuring immersive and strategic gameplay (Epstein et al., 2021; Elias et al., 2012). Clear rules and balanced mechanics are vital for fairness and accessibility (Koster, 2013; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Meaningful player interaction boosts engagement (Woods, 2012), while structured progression maintains challenge (Juul, 2005). Randomness should enhance, not disrupt, control (Costikyan, 1994). Games must offer impactful decisions (Rollings & Adams, 2003) and remain accessible to diverse players (Schell, 2019). Quality components improve appeal (Lin et al., 2017), and iterative playtesting ensures refinement (Fullerton, 2018), resulting in enjoyable and inclusive gaming experiences.

4.4 Benefit of Board Games in Restaurants

In the competitive F&B industry, integrating board games into cafés such as Board Games Cafe Batam enhances customer loyalty through digital marketing, product diversity, and innovation. Digital platforms foster engagement and feedback (Tama & Siagian, 2024), while diverse board games and food options cater to broad customer preferences (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Continuous innovation, including new games, trained staff, and digital booking, differentiates the brand (Schilling, 2020). This synergy builds memorable experiences, encourages repeat visits, and drives organic growth. For entrepreneurs, combining entertainment, tech-driven outreach, and evolving offerings is key to sustainable success and competitive advantage.

4.5 Types of Board Games That Are Appropriate in Restaurant.

Selecting suitable board games for restaurants involves considering size, duration, and interaction level (Nguyen & Lee, 2020). Simple card games like *UNO* and *Exploding Kittens* are ideal due to their portability, ease of play, and brief duration (Taylor & Green, 2018). Miniature board games, such as *Catan: Traveler Edition*, offer strategic play in compact formats. Narrative driven social games like *Werewolf* and *Spyfall* encourage communication and group engagement (Nguyen & Lee, 2020). Logic-based games such as Sudoku provide solitary mental challenges. These games enhance customer experience without disrupting dining operations (Taylor & Green, 2018; Nguyen & Lee, 2020).

4.6 The Best Element in Board Game for Restaurant

Board games suited for restaurant environments must be compact, easy to learn, brief, and foster social interaction. Titles such as *UNO* and *Exploding Kittens* offer light entertainment during meal wait times (Adams et al., 2019). Compact designs like *Anomia* and *Farkle* conserve table space, making them ideal for limited dining areas (Cheong & Kim, 2016). Social games such as *Werewolf* and *Codenames* enhance group dynamics and customer engagement (Lee & Johnson, 2021). Accessibility is also critical; customers are more inclined to choose games with simple rules, such as *Uno* (Parker, 2018; Taylor & Green, 2018; Nguyen & Lee, 2020).

5 OBJECTIVES RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explores how entertainment elements like board games influence customer behavior and satisfaction in restaurants, grounded in stimulus response theory. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative surveys to measure satisfaction, waiting time perception, and game usage, with qualitative interviews to explore customer experiences in depth. Observations and gender-based analysis offer nuanced insights. Guided by Barbosa and Póvoa et al. (2017), the literature review shapes the research questions and thematic focus. Triangulation of surveys, interviews, and observations enhances validity, offering practical implications for hospitality professionals seeking to enrich dining experiences through interactive elements (Fischler, 2017; Mohr, 1999; McLeod, 2018).

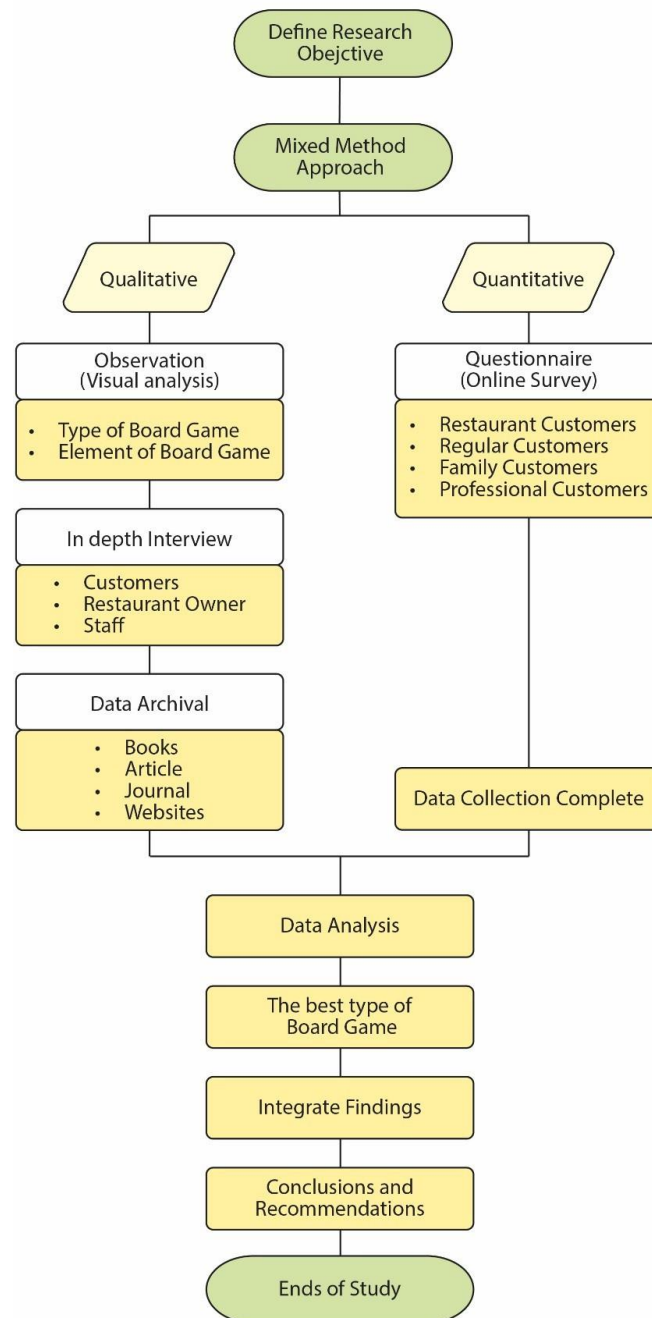


Figure 3 The Research Framework

This study uses a mixed method approach by integrating quantitative surveys for measurable data and qualitative interviews for deeper insights, providing a well-rounded understanding of customer behavior and perceptions.

6 ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

6.1 Survey Analysis

This study employed a quantitative approach using a structured Google Forms questionnaire, allowing broad data collection across five key sections. Section A gathered demographic data to contextualize responses. Section B explored strategies to minimize waiting time in board games, such as simultaneous turns or automated functions. Section C focused on interactive features that enhance engagement, while Section D identified player preferences across game genres. Section E examined design elements like aesthetics and duration. This comprehensive format enabled detailed insights into user behavior, game design preferences, and strategies to improve gameplay and overall user experience (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

6.1.1 Section A: Demographics:

This section presents demographic findings from the questionnaire. Most respondents (60.5%) are university or college students, followed by secondary students (21%) and the public (17.3%). The majority fall within the 18–29 age group (70.4%), suggesting active interest in board games among youth. Adults aged 30 and above comprise 17.3%, while those aged 13–17 make up 12.3%. Gender distribution is nearly equal, with 50.6% male and 49.4% female. These demographics enable deeper analysis of how preferences vary across age, background, and gender, enhancing the relevance of insights gained.

6.1.2 Section B: The best choice for interactive activities:

This section explores respondents' views on effective interactive activities during waiting periods in restaurants. Findings show that 50% prefer board games, followed by card games (34.1%), while mini puzzles are least favored (6.8%), suggesting a preference for socially engaging and accessible games. Regarding game duration, most respondents (75%) favor 10–20 minutes, indicating an ideal balance between engagement and time efficiency. Some prefer quicker sessions (29.5%), while others (20.5%) enjoy longer gameplay. These insights highlight the importance of designing board games that are engaging, time-appropriate, and suitable for casual dining environments.



Figure 4 Survey Question 1 and Question 2 on Section B : The best choice for interactive activities

6.1.3 Section C: The top board games for interactive activities:

This section highlights respondents' preferences for board games suitable in restaurant settings. UNO emerged as the top choice (54.1%) due to its simplicity, short playtime, portability, and social engagement, making it ideal during food waiting periods. Other mentioned games like Monopoly, Jamaica, and Anomia also reflect varied preferences, though less popular. The findings suggest that customers favor light, easy-to-learn games that enhance social interaction without disrupting dining. Integrating such games may improve customer satisfaction, extend stay duration, and serve as a unique marketing tool to boost restaurant appeal.

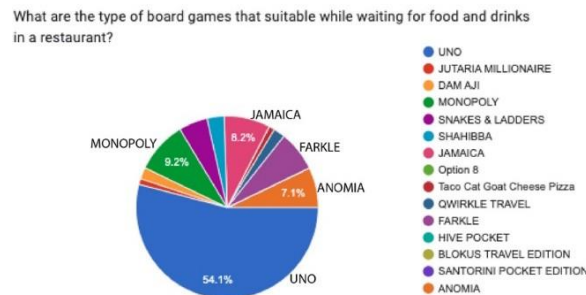


Figure 5 Survey Question 1 on Section C: The top board game for interactive activities

The data reveals that 59.1% of respondents agreed and 31.8% strongly agreed with the statement, showing over 90% positive support. This indicates strong consensus and relevance of the proposal to respondents' experiences. The minimal disagreement suggests shared views and high receptiveness toward the idea such as integrating board games in restaurants. These results provide empirical support for the proposal's feasibility and highlight the importance of aligning service strategies with customer expectations in hospitality settings.

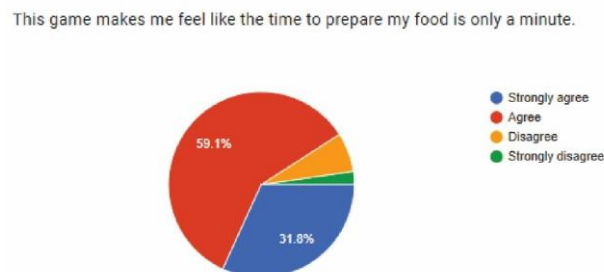


Figure 6 Survey Question 2 on Section C: The top board game for interactive activities

6.1.4 Section C: What elements are present in the board game (Uno) that attract customers to play and keep them engrossed:

This section explores key design elements of board games like UNO that attract and sustain customer engagement in restaurants. Findings show that short game duration (90%) and the ability to easily start and stop (92.5%) are highly valued, aligning with the time-sensitive nature of dining. Bright colors (85%), clear typography (92.5%), and simple symbols (87.5%) enhance visual appeal and ease of play, supporting quick recognition and smooth gameplay. Additionally, practical card shape (92.3%) improves comfort and usability, while an easily recognizable logo (95%) boosts brand identity and quick selection. Lastly, a clear and bright design (92.5%) further draws attention and encourages play. These elements enhance the dining experience by reducing perceived waiting time and promoting social interaction.

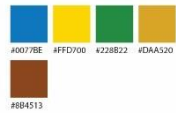
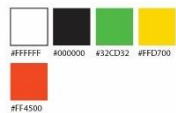
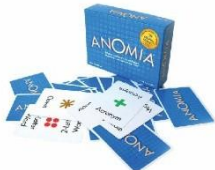
VISUAL ANALYSIS : ELEMENT OF BOARD GAME				
BOARD GAME	FONT	PLAYERS	COLOUR SCHEME	SAIZ
UNO 	Sans-Serif Similar fonts Arial Rounded Futura	2 - 10 players		56 mm x 87 mm (2.2 x 3.43 inches)
MONOPOLY 	Monospace Bold Serif Helvetica Neue	2 - 8 players		Game Board 20x20 inches Cards 2.5x3.5 inches
JAMAICA 	Adventure-themed Pirata One	2 - 6 players		Game Board 20x20 inches Cards 2.5x3.5 inches
FARKI F 	Sans-serif Arial, Helvetice	2 - more players		Dice 16x16 mm Scorecards 105x148 mm
ANOMIA 	Modern sans-serif Arial Rounded, Helvetica	3 - 6 players		Card 2.5x3.5 inches Box 4.5x3.5x1.5 inches

Figure 8 The Visual Analysis on Element of Board Game

This study concludes that integrating board games like UNO, Monopoly, Jamaica, Farkle, and Anomia can enhance customer experience in restaurants by reducing boredom during food preparation. Visual elements such as vibrant colors, simple layouts, and game duration were analyzed to match customer preferences and dining timeframes. Games were selected based on simplicity, engagement, and suitability for restaurant settings. Findings suggest that well-designed, easy-to-play games can increase satisfaction, promote social interaction, and serve as effective value-added tools for improving the overall dining experience (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Glaw et al., 2017; Calzon, 2022).

6.3 In Depth Interview Analysis

According to an interview with both a restaurant owner and a staff member, the integration of board games in restaurant settings offers valuable benefits. The restaurant owner emphasized that interactive activities such as board games help reduce customer boredom while creating a more social and engaging environment. It was mentioned that these activities are more effective than digital or live entertainment, as they promote communication and inclusivity. Meanwhile, the restaurant staff pointed out that Uno is an ideal game due to its short playtime, colorful design, and ease of use. The game's flexibility and vibrant appearance were said to appeal especially to families and children, making the dining experience more enjoyable during waiting times. Both perspectives support the idea that board games enhance customer satisfaction and contribute positively to the restaurant environment. In addition, they agreed that simple, user-friendly games are the most suitable for such environments. Games that are quick to set up and easy to understand can be enjoyed by a wide age range, encouraging shared experiences among customers. These features not only improve customer mood but also provide a more memorable and enjoyable visit.

According to an interview with two types of customers, Customer 2 and Customer 3, board games particularly Uno, are seen as effective tools to enhance the dining experience during waiting times. Customer 2 highlighted that board games promote social interaction and are suitable for all ages, with an ideal playtime of 10–20 minutes to keep customers entertained without being overly distracting. She also emphasized the importance of simple rules and suggested food-themed games to match the restaurant ambiance. These games not only create a relaxed environment but also allow families and friends to bond while waiting. Meanwhile, Customer 3 favored Uno for its short duration, accessibility, and suitability for group play. He found it significantly reduces perceived waiting time and suggested restaurants could enhance customer engagement by customizing Uno to reflect their brand identity. He also recommended that game sets be well-maintained for continued customer use. Both customers agreed that such games not only entertain but also improve the overall dining environment, especially for families and groups. Their insights suggest that well-chosen board games can enrich customer satisfaction and become a valuable part of the dining experience.

7 CONCLUSION

This study highlights Uno as the preferred board game for enhancing customer experience during waiting times in restaurants. Its simplicity, short play duration, and social nature make it ideal for informal dining settings. Both quantitative and qualitative data reveal that Uno reduces boredom and fosters interaction, improving customer satisfaction and emotional well-being. It also offers practical benefits for restaurant owners, serving as a low-cost, engaging feature that enhances branding and customer loyalty. Incorporating such games can create a more positive, memorable dining experience beyond just food and service.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

It was equally divided to all authors; everybody took part in this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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