

Feasibility and Challenges of Introducing Authentic Sanuki Udon Internationally

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Abstract

This paper discussed the possibility and obstacles of exporting Sanuki Udon, the traditional Japanese noodle with thick and chewiness texture and rich taste of Kagawa Prefecture, to the foreign markets and in particular Malaysia. The study was informed by four goals and three central themes, which were production techniques and authenticity, market analysis and consumer perception, and international expansion challenges. Interviews and observations were used to collect the data, and the emphasis was made on hand-made approaches, the use of quality ingredients, and regional differences in preserving authenticity in foreign countries. The consumer preference, pricing, brand recognition, and operational challenges like sourcing of ingredients, cultural adaptation, competition and abiding by regulations were also studied. Based on Cultural Adaptation and Market Demand theories coupled with the knowledge of the important stakeholders such as restaurant owners and the culinary experts, the research revealed the necessity of balancing the customary craftsmanship and innovative production, marketing and operations. The research is of practical use to restaurateurs and business people demonstrating how Sanuki Udon can be a representative of culture and an effective international corporation at the same time.

Keywords: Sanuki Udon, Cultural Adaptation, International Expansion

Introduction

Sanuki Udon is a dish that was born in the Kagawa Prefecture of Japan, and it is characterized by its thick and chewy texture and its rich flavour which is deeply rooted in the culinary tradition of the area (Tadokoro, H., 2024). The process of its preparation, which implies particular methods and the use of wheat flour of high quality, salt, and water, has made it a

regular of Japanese cuisine (Jang, K., Kim, S., and Thenlen, T., 2024). As the culture around Japanese food gains more and more attention worldwide, and udon noodles in particular gain more popularity, with restaurants included, such as Sanuki Udon in New York serving the clientele of Japanese international students (Ng, L. & Chen, 2024), introducing authentic Sanuki Udon to new markets is a major prospective success (Uranishi, K., 2023). Nonetheless, this undertaking will require one to weigh between the need to be authentic and localizing to local preferences and overcoming difficulties of sourcing ingredients (Introducing 'by Age 18, 2023). This paper will explore the viability and issues of launching authentic Sanuki Udon abroad and specifically at areas where there is increasing demand of Japanese food like Malaysia.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

However, even as the Japanese cuisine becomes increasingly popular worldwide, little is known about the issue of challenges and possibilities of bringing authentic Sanuki Udon outside Japan. Among the critical ones, one can distinguish the need to maintain the classic methods of preparation (Jang, Kim, and Thenlen, 2024), the necessity to analyze the market demand and the preferences of the consumers in different foreign backgrounds (Uranishi, 2023), rivalry with local noodle dishes, and the problems with logistics connected to the acquisition of specific ingredients and the equipment (Kazunari Sotto, 2018). The experience of stakeholders in Kagawa who managed to develop udon tourism can be an important solution to overcome these obstacles (Kang, Park, and Kim, 2019).

There are a number of research gaps that also evidenced the necessity of research. There is a small amount of research on how consumers across certain foreign markets, such as that of cultural adaptation, are inclined to Sanuki Udon (Uranishi, 2023). The lack of knowledge about the operational issues that restaurants struggle with trying to retain authenticity but adjust to the local culinary preferences is also low (Laurent, 2018). Also, it is necessary to include the view of the central Kagawa stakeholders, such as restaurant owners and machinery suppliers to gain an in-depth insight into the issues surrounding udon production and its globalization (Kang, Park, and Kim, 2019).

Research Objectives

RO1: To elucidate the traditional techniques and processes involved in crafting authentic Sanuki Udon in Kagawa.

RO2: To analyze the market demand and consumer preferences for Sanuki Udon in selected international markets.

RO3: To identify the operational challenges encountered by restaurants when introducing authentic Sanuki Udon outside Japan.

RO4: To evaluate potential strategies for overcoming logistical hurdles related to ingredient sourcing and machinery procurement, informed by stakeholder insights.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the core traditional techniques and processes involved in producing authentic Sanuki Udon in Kagawa?

RQ2: What is the current market demand for Sanuki Udon among consumers in targeted international markets?

RQ3: What operational challenges do restaurants face when introducing authentic Sanuki Udon outside Japan?

RQ4: What strategies can be implemented to effectively source ingredients and machinery for producing authentic Sanuki Udon abroad?

Significant of Study

The research is important because it fills the gap in understanding the traditional Japanese food culture and the current market needs outside of Japan (Samuel Folorunso Adeyinka-Ojo, Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore, 2016). Through a study of the possible and actual issues associated with the internationalization of Sanuki Udon and the potential solutions, this study will make significant contributions to knowledge areas that can be of interest to restaurant owners and investors as well as culinary entrepreneurs who are intending to take Japanese cuisine to the global market (Ng, L. & Chen, 2024). In addition, it helps to conserve cultural heritage and enhance the development of culinary diversity and tourism (Jang, K., Kim, S., and Thenlen, T., 2024).

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study will be based on a mix of the Cultural Adaptation Theory and the Market Demand Theory: The first is the cultural Adaptation Theory. This model will be used to explore how the conventional Japanese culinary culture like preparing Sanuki Udon can be tailored to suit the international consumer without losing its originality. C., 2018).

Secondly, Theory of Market Demand. This theory will assist in establishing the consumer preference to Japanese food, that is, udon noodles, across the various foreign markets (Uranishi, K., 2023). Through these frameworks, the given study will aim to offer a detailed insight into how the introduction of authentic Sanuki Udon could be effectively done beyond Japan without violating the cultural meaning of the product (Tadokoro, H., 2024).

Relevant Framework for Stakeholder Engagement

Seeing that this research will include the interviews with Kagawa stakeholders, a Stakeholder Engagement Framework will be applied (Kang, B., Park, E., Kim, S., 2019).

- Determine Stakeholders: Add all the stakeholders, such as restaurant owners, machinery providers, culinary professionals and industry associations (Kang, B., Park, E., Kim, S., 2019).
- Evaluate Interests and Influence: Determine the degree of interest and ability of each of the stakeholders when it comes to the launching of Sanuki Udon in a different country.
- Engagement Strategy: Work on the customization of engagement strategy to every stakeholder group (e.g., interviews) to collect insights.
- Feedback Mechanism: Establish a system for incorporating stakeholder feedback into the research findings and recommendations.

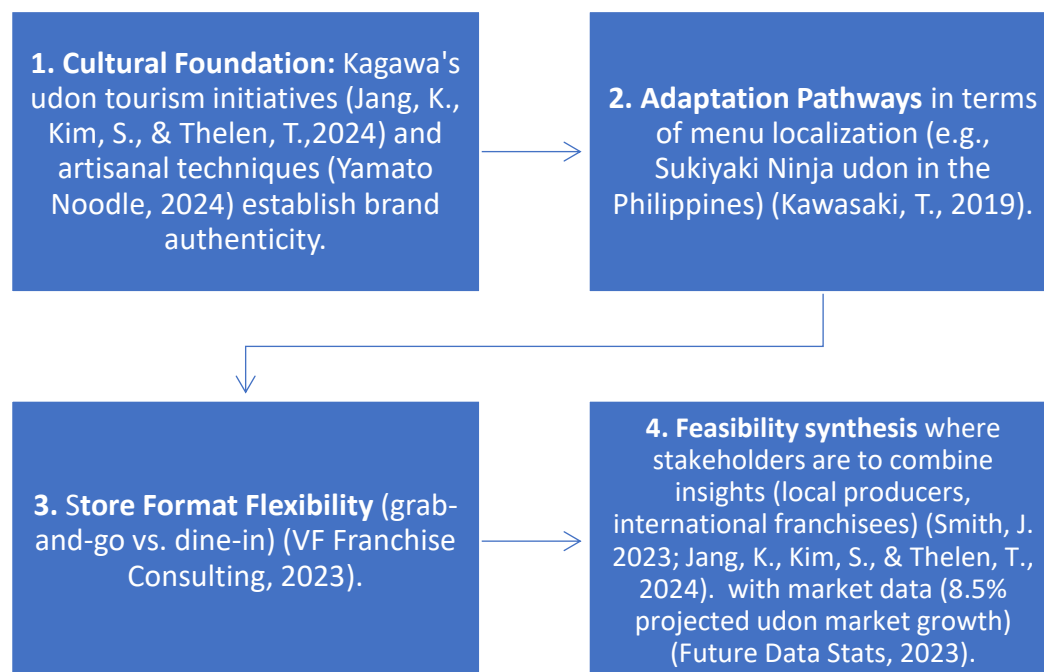
This framework shall ensure that all relevant voices are heard during the research process, enhancing the validity and applicability of the study's outcomes (Kang, B., Park, E., Kim, S., 2019). Figure 2.1 below effectively captures the multidimensional analysis required to assess Sanuki udon's global potential through three interconnected frameworks:

Theoretical Operations Integration

Cultural Adaptation (Theoretical)	Market Dynamic (Theoretical)	Operational Framework
Udon has roots that run deep in Kagawa, tied to a long tradition of hand-kneading and time-tested methods (Jang, K., Kim, S., & Thenlen, T., 2024; Yamato Noodle, 2024). But tradition isn't the whole story. What people actually want matters too. Toridoll Holdings shows how it works. When they branched out abroad, they didn't just stick to the old recipes. In Thailand, they rolled out a tom yum broth. In China, they went with tomato. Still, they kept the heart of the dish intact, making sure it felt true to its origins while actually appealing to local tastes (Kawasaki, T, 2019).	Consumers now look for healthier, more affordable noodle options (Kawasaki, T., 2019; Future Data Stats, 2023). Yamashita Honki Udon targets city markets, pushing for urban expansion (VF Franchise Consulting., 2023), while Marugame Seimen grows steadily in the U.S. with a 5.8% CAGR forecast (Future Data Stats, 2023). Both brands blend premium appeal with easy access, showing how companies adapt to changing tastes and expectations.	Addresses logistical hurdles: - Nakano Shikoku's 2024 export expansion (Future Data Stats 2023) highlights solutions for securing specialty wheat/flour. - Marugame Seimen's in-house noodle-making policy (Smith, J. 2023) ensures quality control despite regional variations in water/flour (Kawasaki, T, 2019).

Cultural-to-Commercial Flow

The Figure traces Sanuki udon's journey from its Kagawa origins to global viability:



Stakeholder Synergy

Local Insights (Kagawa)	Global Perspectives
Public-private collaborations promoting udon tourism (Jang, K., Kim, S., & Thelen, T., 2024).	Franchise models with turnkey training systems (VF Franchise Consulting., 2023)
Preservation of "seven ironclad rules" for traditional preparation (Yamato Noodle., 2024).	Technology integration (digital menus in U.S. locations) (Smith, J., 2023).

The figure shows that Sanuki udon's success really depends on balancing two things: keeping its cultural roots intact while also pushing for new ways to run the business (Smith, J., 2023). Toridoll's more than 600 international shops prove this works (Tawaki Kawasaki, 2019). They show that you can take a regional specialty and scale it globally (Future Data Stats, 2023; Future Data Stats, 2025).

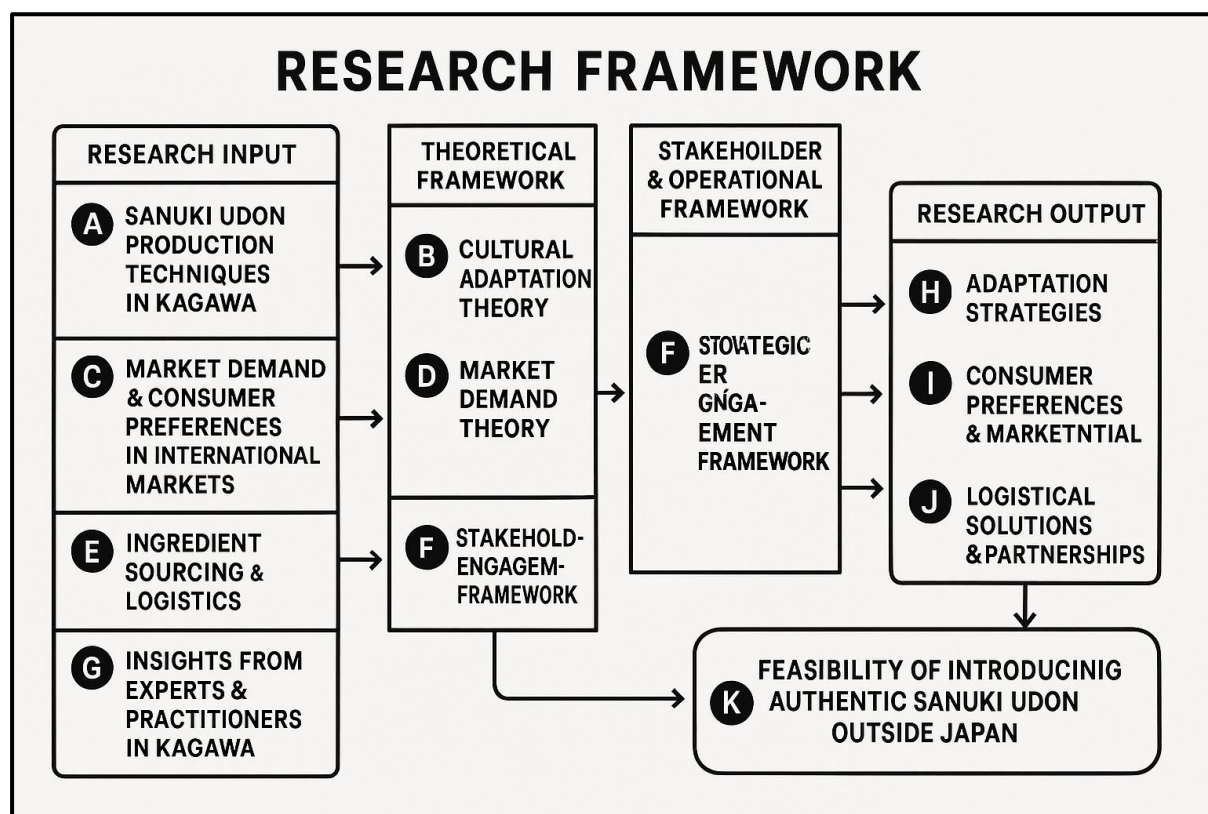


Figure 2.1 Research Framework

This research framework digs into whether it's really possible to bring authentic Sanuki Udon to places outside Japan. First, it lays out the groundwork by looking at four main things. It starts with traditional Sanuki Udon production techniques in Kagawa. Then it examines what people actually want and expect in international markets. Next, it gets into the practical problems: finding the right ingredients and handling logistics. Finally, it draws on the experience and opinions of experts and practitioners in Kagawa.

The researcher use two main theoretical frameworks to break down this input. First, Cultural Adaptation Theory (Framework B) helps me figure out how to adjust Sanuki Udon for global tastes without losing what makes it unique. Then, Market Demand Theory (D) lets me dig into consumer behavior and size up the market potential. Alongside these, I rely on the Stakeholder Engagement Framework (F) to gather key insights and build strong partnerships with important stakeholders.

The Research Output breaks down into three key parts. First, there's Adaptation Strategies, which come straight from the Cultural Adaptation analysis. Next, Consumer Preferences & Market Potential, those insights grow out of the Market Demand analysis. Finally, Logistical Solutions & Partnerships, shaped by working with stakeholders and digging into operational details. All these pieces come together for one main goal: figuring out if it really makes sense to bring authentic Sanuki Udon to markets outside Japan. The visual layout makes it clear how everything connects and how each part pushes the research toward its final answer.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research employed a qualitative approach with analysis of secondary data, incorporating various qualitative data collection methods.

1. **Interviews with Key Stakeholders:** The researcher spoke with the President of the Restaurant Association in Japan to get a better sense of market dynamics (SK). In Kagawa, researcher met with owners and managers of udon restaurants to learn firsthand about traditional preparation methods (OU). Researcher also sat down with machinery suppliers and consultants in Kagawa to evaluate what kind of equipment production really needs (MS).
2. **Observation through Field Visits:** Field visits (FV) were carried out to udon restaurants in Kagawa to observe traditional preparation techniques firsthand and to collect qualitative information on customer preferences.

Interview Protocol

These interview protocols aimed to get real input from the main players bringing authentic Sanuki Udon to new places outside Japan. The structure kept things organized, but left enough room for open conversation. That way, participants could share real insights without feeling boxed in and the process respected their busy schedules.

Researcher travelled to Japan for the feasibility study, wanting to see the Sanuki Udon market up close. Since not everyone spoke the same language, researcher brought in an interpreter for the interviews. That way, researcher didn't miss any details conversations went smoothly, and gathered richer, more accurate information.

The interviews followed a structured format and protocols, which included key questions such as:

1. Participants were asked to describe their role and their organization's experience with Japanese cuisine or udon production.
2. They were asked about the traditional techniques they used in making Sanuki Udon.
3. They were asked to share their views on the potential demand for Sanuki Udon in international markets.

4. They discussed the challenges they had faced in expanding outside Japan.
5. They highlighted environmental and customer experience factors important in their restaurant settings.
6. They described technological trends or machinery they had adopted for udon production.
7. They provided details on the types of machinery offered, including costs and delivery timelines for international orders.
8. They explained how they supported restaurants with installation and training.
9. They discussed current trends in the global Japanese cuisine market, particularly udon.
10. They reflected on how authenticity could be maintained while adapting to local tastes.
11. They described supply chain challenges for sourcing ingredients.
12. They recommended suppliers or regions for high-quality ingredients.
13. They outlined essential support for restaurants introducing authentic Sanuki Udon.
14. They emphasized the importance of stakeholder collaboration in maintaining quality.
15. They discussed key challenges and growth opportunities for new entrants outside Japan.

This approach gets stakeholders talking in a meaningful way. Their insights shape the understanding of what it really takes to bring authentic Sanuki Udon outside Japan. What is possible, what is tough, and where the landmines are. By weaving these points into the interview guide and working closely with the interpreter, researcher made field research more effective. The data we gathered is not just thorough, it gives the feasibility study real depth.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started as researcher collected it, diving into interview transcripts and field notes from our visits right away. For the framework, researcher leaned on Miles and Huberman's approach to thematic analysis (1994), and drew from Corbin and Strauss (2014) for the broader data analysis steps. Thematic analysis meant digging for patterns, spotting themes that spoke directly to the research questions and pushing beyond surface-level descriptions to find what really mattered in people's experiences. During data reduction, researcher coded and sorted everything, breaking the material down into smaller pieces. This is to allow capture the essentials, reorganize the information, and start building solid propositions.

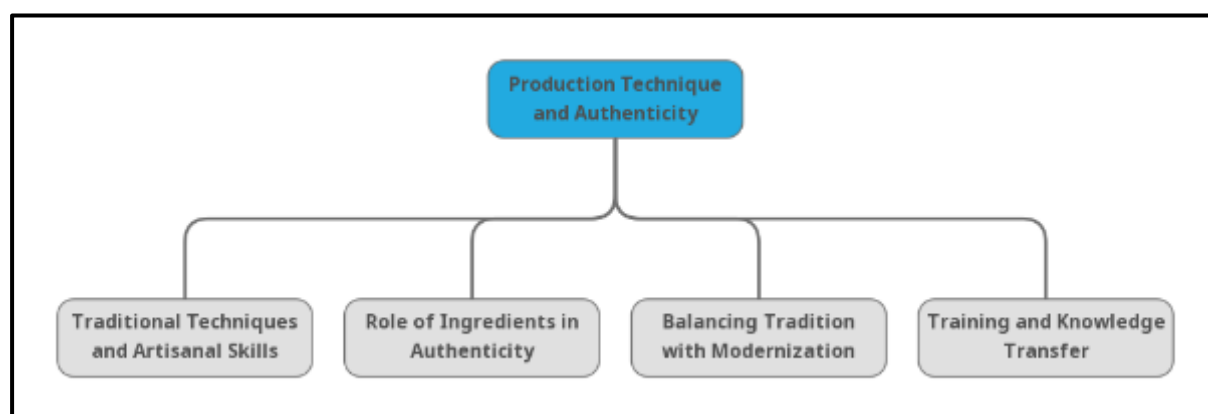
Data display brought the themes together, making it easier to spot patterns and contradictions. This step pushed the analysis toward a stronger theoretical foundation. As for drawing conclusions, the focus was on connecting themes in a way that built a clear, meaningful explanation. The researcher leaned on grounded theory and constant comparative methods. Started with open coding, breaking the data into small pieces. Then came axial coding, where those pieces are grouped into broader categories. Finally, with selective coding, wove the categories together into larger themes. Throughout, researcher kept comparing data, writing memos, and cycling back to earlier steps. This hands-on, back and forth approach led to a deeper grasp of the material. Along the way, researcher kept refining the themes, shaping a detailed framework that matched the study's main ideas.

Trustworthiness, Reliability and Validity

Researcher built trust in this study by using two triangulation methods. Gathering data from different sources and bringing in a diverse group of participants. This approach boosted both internal validity and reliability. Everyone joined the study voluntarily, and researcher kept their information confidential. To strengthen validity, researcher used detailed, specialized coding schemes. Researcher made sure internal validity held up by recording data accurately and asking participants for feedback. For external validity, researcher aimed to make the findings relevant in different settings. Reliability came from “disciplined subjectivity”. The researcher constantly checked and rechecked every step. Throughout the research, researcher used audio recordings and carefully coded transcripts to keep everything consistent.

Result and Analysis

In this chapter, researcher dive into Sanuki Udon through four main themes that came out of the research: how it's made and what makes it authentic, its cultural role and what it means for regional identity, how the market and consumers see it, and the hurdles and possibilities that come with taking Sanuki Udon global.

Theme 1: Production Technique and Authenticity**Initial Code:** Traditional Techniques and Artisanal Skills

From the interviews, findings revealed that foot-kneading and hand-cutting remain essential for the unique chewy texture. Tactile judgment during kneading and resting times are crucial and difficult to replicate precisely by machinery, posing challenges when scaling production.

“It is all about Dough (koshi) and soup (dashi shoyou)”. (SK)

“Even with machines, we must use feelings to meet expectation of hand-made noodles” (MS)

Initial Code: Role of Ingredients in Authenticity

The study also found out that the use of high-quality local wheat flour, salt, and iriko-based soup is fundamental. Substituting with imported ingredients can impact flavor and texture, though some experimentation with blends helps adapt to new markets.

“In Kagawa anchovies Iriko is main ingredients of soup base” (SK)

Initial Code: Balancing Tradition with Modernization

Semi-automated and fully automated machines help speed things up, but they can't replace skilled artisans for the most important steps. Automation brings its own challenges too. Maintenance, tricky operations, that sort of thing. From the interviews, there are two main noodle making machines. One is a home-made style model, priced at USD 35,000 plus export charges. The other is a fully automatic top series machine for USD 30,000. The top series makes the process easier, but Japanese customers do not really like it, and it is mostly meant for ramen.

Both machines need experienced hands. Humans still have to knead and press the dough, check its texture by hand, and pay close attention to timing, like leaving the dough to rest overnight and making sure it does not sit around too long. Regular cleaning is a must, and the blades need to be swap once a year.

In addition, machine and equipment can be buy from either Japan or Singapore, depending on which currency works out better at the time. Furthermore, consultants offer hands on training in Japan, like Kagawa, Tokyo, and Osaka for RM3,000 per person. The idea is to give the skills to run things on your own. They'll also come to your site to help set everything up, for RM3,000 plus flight costs.

"I appreciate staff that has been working with me for more than 20 years" (SK)

"Home-made style noodle making machine (USD35,000) + export fees (JPY500,000) and Top series fully automatic slightly cheaper USD30,000 (not so acceptable to Japanese people though process is so much easier, process all at once. For ramen yes" (OU)

"We can supply all equipment and utensils required in kitchen" (MS)

"The hand-made computerized machine still need manpower to operate. Including checking the texture of dough by touching and feeling including resting the dough overnight. Some judgment is need on time line especially when restaurant is busy. Meaning dough also cannot be stored too long in fridge. Manpower is needed to operate the machine during the kneading, pressing in different directions etc." (MS)

"Maintenance include clean up, once a year change the blade from supplier. We have a sister company in Singapore. You can order from Japan or Singapore depends on the currency which is deemed better for you" (MS)

"Consultancy include sending people to learn in kagawa, Tokyo or Osaka 2-4 days (RM3,000 per person). Then they can run on their own" (MS)

"Usually Japan cannot export Shoyou that has liquor. Need to find out regulations" (MS)

As a whole, modernization brings significant efficiency and consistency benefits, but critical artisanal judgments and timely interventions remain indispensable to preserve quality and process integrity.

Initial Code: Training and Knowledge Transfer

It is interesting to find out that sustaining quality depends on training key personnel and transferring tacit knowledge. Loss of skilled operator risks declines in product quality, and detailed manuals cannot fully substitute hands-on experience. The findings confirmed that Taste acceptance has been confirmed, but there is uncertainty around sourcing ingredients for the proprietary "black box" recipe, which must be developed independently; locally sourced flour may reduce costs.

Soy sauce (shoyou) can be imported or alternatively sourced, though import regulations on soy sauce containing liquor need clarification. Past failures, such as a Japanese operator's unsuccessful KL branch, highlight that marketing, branding, and localization issues—rather than product quality—are the main challenges. Customers struggled to understand product differentiation, and sustaining consistent quality overtime proved difficult, especially after consultants left due to high costs.

Manuals cannot fully capture tacit knowledge like boiling techniques, making a key skilled person vital for maintaining quality. The success of brands like "Koya Soho," which benefited from perseverance and authentic Japanese origins, underscores the importance of strong branding and leadership. Despite automation, human judgment remains crucial, with ongoing challenges in operational costs, quality sustainability, and reliance on skilled personnel.

"Flour may be cheaper in home country. Shoyou can be imported or other also ok" (MS&SK)

"To control supply, black box is the one you are going to create" (MS)

"Taste is accepted in restaurant. When you don't know where to get ingredients for the black box. You must create your own black box. For instances flour. Add something more. First of all, you must create what you want. Cost may be a concern" (MS&SK)

"My experience of how previous customer succeed or failed - Yes, one operator from Japan opened a branch in KL, but they did not do well. 10 years ago, closed. Problem is, people know they sell udon, marketing problem. Many operations in overseas, not successful. It is branding issue. Not successful – why? Not quality issue, taste good. Problem is no one knows about the udon. Localize is an issue... consultant will give you the basic. "We could not create what it is supposed to be". They cannot sustain the quality. Once consultant left, cannot sustained. – give way to quality because of high cost is always the case. Quality overtime is the issue... no more money to sustain the quality over a long time. Manual – cannot write everything in the manual. E.g. Boiling. Need a key person, once quit cannot continue" (MS)

"Yes, the key person must be the owner" (MS & SK)

"Koya soho for example. Why they succeed? How to follow? No.1, need some time. Sustained because they could overcome challenges. Brand is that it is Jap that started the restaurant, and people knows - Japanese started" (MS)

The researcher backed up the data with direct observation in the field. What really stands out is that making udon isn't about technical hurdles, it's about people. Most businesses outside

Japan don't struggle because of the process itself. They fail because they lack the right expertise and a real dedication to quality and tradition. Feeling the dough by hand is a skill you can't fake; it's at the heart of keeping standards high. For a shop to work, the main person in charge needs to be a master of the secret recipe and know how to meet demand without ever cutting corners, relying on experience and confidence. Sure, technical problems come up, but people and their level of commitment, plus the willingness to invest are the real make-or-break factors.

"Some udon making process needs to be feeled by touch" (FV)

"Technical part - if not why many venture outside japan fails – It is the people that uphold the quality and culture" (FV)

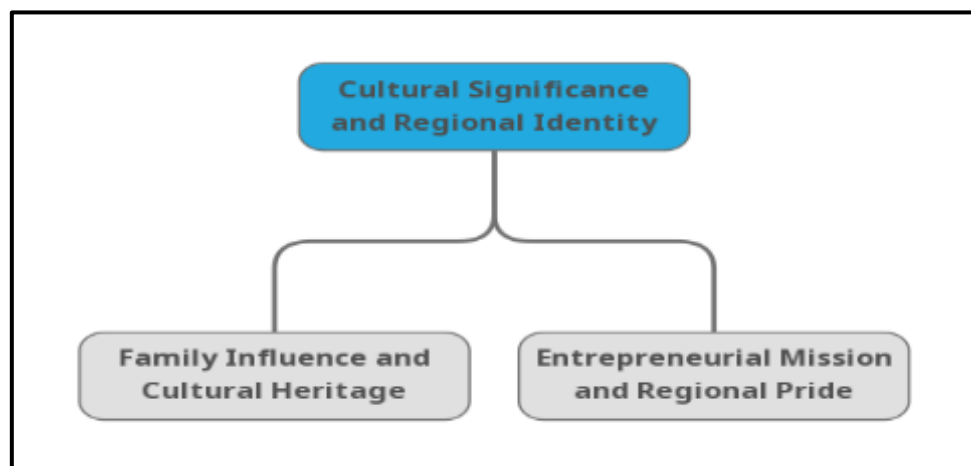
"Simple observation - Technical issues can all be solved. People issue is the challenge" (FV)

"Main advice - Main stakeholder must be the expert of the black box" (FV)

"Market in – what customer wants to find to test; product out – with experience what you can provide with confidence - that is the balance" (FV)

"Key is issue of people and investment" (FV)

Theme 2: Cultural Significance and Regional Identity



Initial Code: Family Influence and Cultural Heritage

Based on interview, the findings revealed that udon is more than food; it embodies family traditions and regional identity. Experiences like family gatherings or festivals deepen its cultural significance.

"Family influence, passionate and food appreciation" (SK)

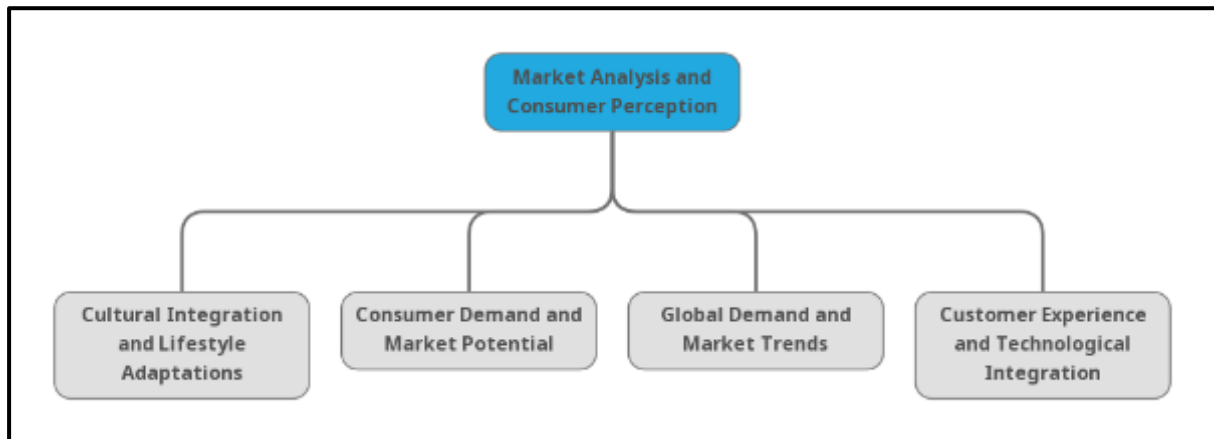
Initial Code: Entrepreneurial Mission and Regional Pride

Interesting to find out that since 1998, local entrepreneurs have pursued preserving and promoting Sanuki Udon, blending innovation with tradition to strengthen community engagement and regional pride.

"It is about the excitement of serving udon" (SK)

"It is all about my mission to be entrepreneur since 1998 after university" (SK)

Theme 3: Market Analysis and Consumer Perception

**Initial Code:** Cultural Integration and Lifestyle Adaptations

Participants have predominantly shared the thoughts on Udon's integration into daily life varies by region. It serves as a quick, culturally relevant meal, often accompanied by side dishes, reflecting deep-rooted traditions as seen in slogans like "no udon no life."

"Slogan no udon no life. Self – service" (SK)

Initial Code: Consumer Demand and Market Potential

In addition, the thoughts also revealed that as a staple carbohydrate in Asian diets, udon appeals to diverse consumers seeking convenient, affordable, and healthy meal options. Instant and ready-to-cook products increase accessibility.

"Noodles are basically main consumption of carbs of Asian. According to the local lifestyle / tradition, potential demand" (SK&OU)

Initial Code: Global Demand and Market Trends

Interestingly, rising global interest in Japanese cuisine drives udon's popularity. Marketing efforts such as Kagawa's frozen udon launch in the U.S. leverage health trends and convenience to expand reach.

"Lifestyle is a matter" (SK&OU)

Initial Code: Customer Experience and Technological Integration

Findings revealed that restaurant ambiance and technology (e.g., online ordering, automated cooking) influence perceptions of authenticity and convenience, while instant or frozen products impact acceptance without compromising quality.

"It depends. Tradition of side dishes, fast-eat-go setting as daily food" (SK&OU)

Theme 4: Challenges and Opportunities for International Expansion**Initial Code:** Logistical Challenges

Recent research points out a real problem: finding genuine traditional ingredients overseas isn't easy. This challenge hits udon producers hard, especially when they try to blend automated machines with the kind of hands-on craftsmanship the noodles need. Price swings and shaky supply chains only make things tougher, pushing operations into unstable territory. So, for anyone involved, it's vital to keep a tight grip on their recipes and where they get their ingredients. That's the only way to keep costs in check without sacrificing quality.

"Logistics of raw material is the challenge" (SK&MS)

"Machinery that incorporate "hand-made" craftsmanship. As in restaurant setting, it depends" (MS)

Initial Code: Strategic Opportunities Growth

It is also seen in findings that leveraging udon's rich 1,300-year cultural heritage provides a powerful foundation for strong branding that can resonate in global markets. By focusing on passionate people and simplified menus, businesses can sustain high standards while managing costs. Effective marketing strategies, combined with careful investment management of ingredients, rent, and salaries, aim to achieve profit margins exceeding 150%. Overseas partnerships offer promising solutions to overcome Japan's franchising challenges and facilitate successful expansion into new international markets, helping to broaden udon's global appeal while preserving its authenticity.

"Franchise is hard in Japan" (SK&MS)

"Branding, source of ingredients, salt water and wheat flour (Australia) and black box. Philosophy – people" (SK&MS)

"Black box is owned by main stakeholder. Control recipe and cost are priority" (SK&MS)

“Udon culture 1300 years ago. Passion is very important. Technical skills no problem, but people to maintain standard is critical. Most of the time, owners may sacrifice cost with quality. So better simple menu” (SK&MS)

“With good concept of marketing, take care of investment vs return (list of ingredient, rent, salary etc.) margin should be more than 150%, should expand the food culture to the world” (SK)

Summary of the Main Findings

The conceptual framework developed in this study presents a hierarchical structure that begins with four Research Objectives (RO1–RO4) and culminates in three interrelated primary themes, each addressing essential aspects of introducing Authentic Sanuki Udon internationally.

Production Techniques and Authenticity

This theme dives into why keeping traditional Japanese udon-making alive matters, real ingredients, handmade methods, all of it. The heart of Sanuki Udon lies in the artisanal skills that shape its texture, flavor, and overall quality. Across Japan, regions put their own spin on udon, so you get a range of techniques and approaches. That variety makes quality control essential, especially when people try to recreate authentic udon outside Japan. Tadokoro (2024) and Jang, Kim, & Thenlen (2024) make it clear: these traditions and skills set genuine udon apart in a crowded global market.

Market Analysis and Consumer Perception

This theme dives into what drives global demand for udon noodles, zeroing in on what people want, how much they're willing to pay, and how they see different brands. Figuring out how international consumers view Sanuki Udon helps shape smarter marketing and sharper product positioning. It's not just about what's on the shelf, but also about how udon stacks up against the competition. Where can udon win over more fans? Work from Ng & Chen (2024) and Uranishi (2023) sheds light on how people make choices and what prices they'll accept—insights that shape bold, effective ways to break into new markets.

Challenges and Opportunities for International Expansion

This theme digs into the real-world hurdles of bringing authentic Sanuki Udon to foreign markets; think logistics, culture, and all those regulations that can trip you up. Sourcing the right ingredients and setting up a smooth distribution network is not easy, especially if you want to keep things true to tradition. There is also the tricky part of localizing udon: how do you tweak it just enough for new customers without watering down what makes it special? Competition is fierce, both from local favorites and other international players. And, of course, you need to stay on top of rules—import restrictions, food safety standards, all the legal hoops. Research from Kazunari Sotta (2018) and Kang, Park, & Kim (2019) shines a light on the industry landscape and points out strategies that actually help Sanuki Udon make it big worldwide, and do it sustainably.

As a whole, the three themes provide a comprehensive lens through which to explore the multifaceted process of introducing Authentic Sanuki Udon internationally, ensuring that

both the cultural heritage and business realities are thoughtfully integrated into strategic planning.

Discussion of the Findings

The integrated analysis identifies three key dimensions essential for Sanuki Udon's successful international introduction:

Udon Craftsmanship and Cultural Integrity	Hand-kneading, foot-stomping, picking just the right ingredients—these old-school techniques still give Sanuki Udon its signature texture and taste (Yamato Noodle, 2024). Producers face a real challenge here: keeping these traditional methods alive while bringing in machines. But that's the only way to keep things authentic (Jang, Kim, & Thenlen, 2024). Cultural Adaptation Theory backs this up, arguing for a careful balance. Sure, you can tweak the broth to fit local preferences, but you can't water down the noodles' identity (Laurent, 2018; Kawasaki, 2019). In Kagawa, stakeholders take this seriously. Their commitment shows up in hands-on training and a stubborn loyalty to tradition (Kang, Park, & Kim, 2019).
Market Demand and Consumer Adaptation	Empirical studies and Market Demand Theory both show a surge in global interest for Japanese cuisine, especially udon noodles. People want meals that are healthier and easy to grab (Uranishi, 2023; Future Data Stats, 2023). Of course, not every market reacts the same way. Culture, local food habits, and competition from other noodle types shape how well udon catches on (Ng & Chen, 2024). Still, there's real potential in places like Malaysia, the U.S., and big Asian cities, where busy lifestyles push people toward quick-service and ready-to-eat meals (VF Franchise Consulting, 2023). Brands that localize their menus, adapt their store formats, and use technology for ordering and delivery connect better with these consumers and fit more smoothly into local food scenes (Smith, 2023).
Operational Challenges and Strategic Solutions	International expansion entails complex logistical obstacles, including sourcing authentic ingredients, securing specialized machinery, and maintaining quality standards across diverse markets (Kazunari Sotta, 2018; Future Data Stats, 2023). Insights from industry stakeholders reveal successful strategies such as in-house noodle production to ensure consistency and public-private partnerships promoting udon tourism and cultural preservation in Kagawa (Jang, Kim, & Thenlen, 2024; Kang, Park, & Kim, 2019). Leading companies demonstrate that a strategic duality, upholding cultural integrity while embracing operational innovation. It is critical to scalability. This includes adapting product formulations to local preferences without diluting brand authenticity (Tawaki Kawasaki, 2019; Smith, 2023).
Synthesis and Future Directions	By bringing together Cultural Adaptation Theory, Market Demand Theory and the Stakeholder Engagement Framework, this study presents a cultural-to-commercial flow model that follows how Sanuki Udon evolves from a regional specialty into a global offering (Laurent, 2018; Uranishi, 2023; Kang, Park, & Kim, 2019). Its success relies on finding the right balance between tradition and modern expectations—protecting artisanal techniques, meeting the needs of different consumer groups, and navigating supply chain and regulatory challenges through strong collaboration among stakeholders (Smith, 2023). This work fills important gaps by offering practical insights for restaurateurs, culinary entrepreneurs and policymakers who want to bring authentic Japanese cuisine to international markets without compromising its cultural identity. In the end, Sanuki Udon represents more than a beloved dish; it acts as a cultural bridge, connecting heritage with innovation in a globalised food landscape.

Recommended Strategies

This section presents recommended strategies that comprehensively address all four research objectives (RO), grounded in the study's findings. Although a new conceptual framework has emerged, centered around three key themes, the insights gained provide a clear direction for practical application and future research. These recommendations aim to bridge gaps identified during the study, enhance understanding, and offer actionable strategies that reflect the complexities revealed by the data. By synthesizing the core themes, this section offers a cohesive response to the research objectives while highlighting opportunities to advance the field.

To address RO1 - To understand the traditional techniques and processes involved in making authentic Sanuki Udon in Kagawa.

Preserve Traditional Techniques

Continue emphasizing foot-kneading and hand-cutting methods to maintain the unique texture of Sanuki Udon. These processes not only contribute to its chewy consistency but also serve as a cultural identifier. Incorporate tactile judgment into dough preparation, ensuring that skilled artisans assess texture and resting times manually.

Integrate Machinery Strategically

While maintaining traditional techniques, consider using machinery for certain steps (e.g., mixing or initial kneading) to enhance efficiency without compromising quality. Ensure that any automated processes do not replace critical manual steps like foot-kneading, which are essential for achieving the desired texture.

Training Programs for Artisans

Develop comprehensive training programs focusing on both traditional techniques and modern adaptations. This will help ensure that new generations of artisans can preserve authentic methods while adapting to changing production needs.

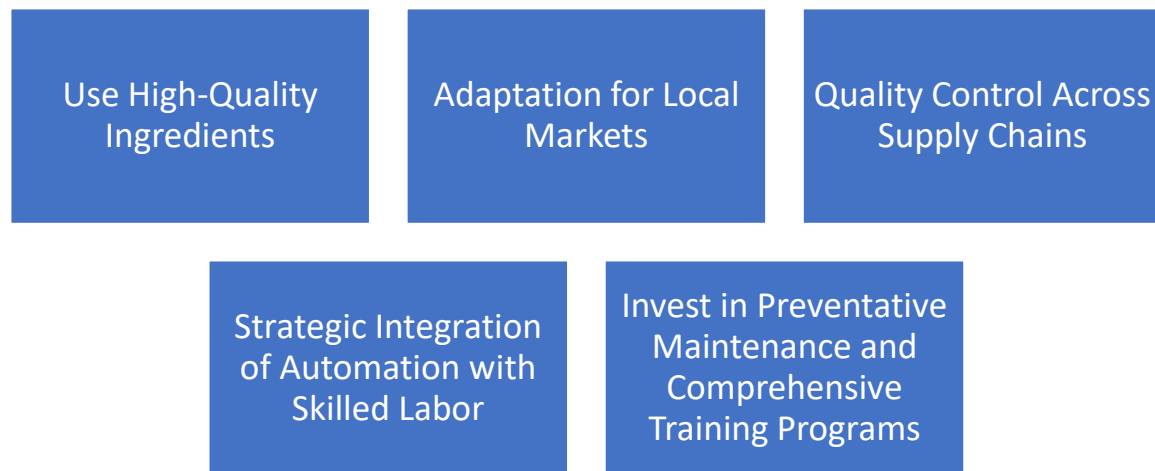
Quality Control Measures

Implement rigorous quality control measures when scaling production or introducing machinery. Regularly monitor product consistency and adjust processes as needed to maintain authenticity.

Cultural Promotion

Highlight the cultural significance of traditional udon-making techniques in marketing efforts to appeal to consumers seeking authentic experiences.

By following these recommendations, producers can balance tradition with modernization while preserving the essence of Sanuki Udon's unique character. Main advice is the main stakeholder must be the expert of the black box.



Key recommendations related to maintaining quality in food production, particularly when considering international operations like those involving Japan:

1. **Prioritize Comprehensive Training and Knowledge Transfer Programs:** Implement extensive training initiatives focusing not only on technical skills but also on the cultural aspects and intuitive judgments crucial for maintaining product quality. This includes leveraging consultancy programs in Japan to acquire specialized skills and knowledge. Furthermore, focus on mentorship programs to transfer tacit knowledge from experienced artisans to newer staff. Develop detailed manuals as a foundation, but emphasize hands-on training and experiential learning to cultivate the intuitive understanding necessary for consistent high-quality output.
2. **Invest in Employee Retention and Development Strategies:** Recognize that skilled personnel are the cornerstone of quality and cultural preservation. Implement strategies to retain key operators, such as competitive compensation and benefits opportunities for career advancement and skill enhancement. and fostering a supportive work environment. This investment minimizes the risk of losing valuable expertise, which can lead to a decline in product quality over time. Building a strong organizational culture that values and rewards expertise is crucial for long-term success.

To address RO2: To explore the market demand and consumer preferences for Sanuki Udon in selected international markets.

1. **Emphasize that Sanuki Udon is more than just food;** it's a symbol of Kagawa Prefecture's rich food culture, regional identity, and the passion of its locals. Kagawa is even known as "Udon Prefecture" due to its high production and consumption of Udon. The community, from wheat farmers to family-run udon shops, is connected through udon, making it a cultural cornerstone.
2. **Udon's Role in Daily Life and Traditions:** Showcase personal and communal experiences with Udon, highlighting its integration into daily life, family traditions, and local festivals. Udon is enjoyed in various styles and is deeply ingrained in the identity of the

people of Kagawa. Many udon shops have a family atmosphere and are community hubs. Eating udon is even a tradition to celebrate the end of the rice planting season.

3. **Authenticity and Education as Key Differentiators:** Emphasize the authenticity of the Sanuki Udon experience by sourcing high-quality ingredients, adhering to traditional preparation methods, and educating consumers about the cultural significance of udon in Kagawa Prefecture. This can involve offering udon-making workshops, sharing stories about the origins and traditions of udon, and highlighting the unique characteristics of Sanuki udon such as its firm texture and distinct flavor. Collaborating with local partners who understand and appreciate Japanese culture can help maintain authenticity and credibility.
4. **Community Engagement and Sustainable Practices:** Integrate community engagement and sustainable practices into the business model to align with broader Japanese cultural values. This could involve sourcing local ingredients where possible, minimizing waste through innovative recycling programs inspired by Kagawa's Udon Total Recycling Project, and supporting local community initiatives. Promote the idea that "Udon is a resource" and "Udon is an environment-friendly food," as seen in Kagawa. By demonstrating a commitment to social and environmental responsibility, the entrepreneurial mission can resonate with consumers who value sustainability and community involvement.

To address to RO3: To identify the operational challenges faced by restaurants when introducing authentic Sanuki Udon outside Japan.

1. **Cater to the "Fast-Eat-Go" Lifestyle with Localized Flavors:** Recognize that udon can serve as a quick and culturally relevant meal for busy Malaysians. Offer affordable options and efficient service to cater to the "fast-eat-go" setting. However, differentiate your brand by blending classic Japanese flavors with local Malaysian tastes. Team Udon, for example, offers inventive creations such as Buttermilk Udon and Udon Lemak, a unique twist on nasi lemak. This approach acknowledges the fast-paced lifestyle while appealing to local preferences.
2. **Emphasize Udon's Cultural Relevance and Community Engagement:** Promote udon as more than just a meal; highlight its cultural significance and integration into daily routines. Consider slogans like "No Udon No Life" to emphasize how deeply ingrained noodles are in local food culture and identity. Create a welcoming atmosphere, possibly emulating the family atmosphere of traditional udon shops. Furthermore, demonstrate inclusivity by sourcing ingredients from halal-certified suppliers and catering to diverse tastes, as Team Udon does. Engaging with the local community can build loyalty and reinforce udon's position as a culturally relevant and enjoyable dining option.

To address to RO4: To assess potential strategies for overcoming logistical hurdles related to ingredient sourcing and machinery procurement.

1. Key is issue of people and investment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the findings of this study, Figure 5.1 shows the new integrated framework emerged to guide the introduction of authentic Sanuki Udon outside of Japan, consisting of three interconnected components: Udon Craftsmanship, Noodle Demand, and Global Udon. Udon Craftsmanship encompasses the traditional ingredients, handmade

techniques, regional variations, and quality control measures that define the core authenticity and cultural value of Sanuki Udon.

This foundational component directly influences Noodle Demand, which captures consumer preferences, market demand, pricing strategies, and brand perception, reflecting how well the product aligns with and adapts to diverse international markets. Both craftsmanship and market dynamics are affected by and must respond to the third component, Global Udon, which addresses the challenges and opportunities of international expansion, including logistics, supply chain management, cultural adaptation, competition, and regulatory compliance.

These components form a dynamic system where the preservation of artisanal quality supports positive consumer perception and demand, while strategic operational management and cultural sensitivity enable successful market entry and growth. Together, they highlight the necessity of balancing tradition with innovation and adaptability, as decisions in one area profoundly impact the effectiveness and sustainability of the others within this holistic framework.

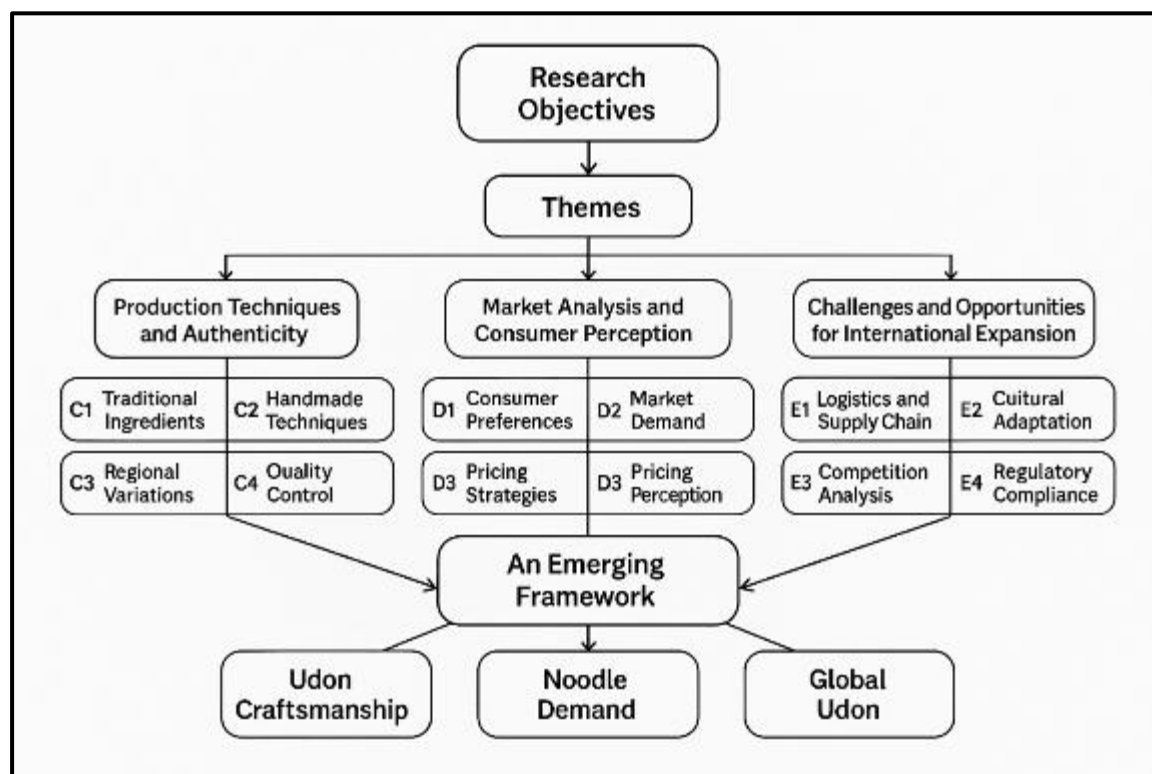


Figure 5.1 Revised framework based on the findings of the study

The study, while thorough, is constrained by its dependence on qualitative data drawn from a relatively small sample and the specific contexts of participant experiences. Although the findings offer valuable insights, they may not be broadly applicable to all international markets due to variations in consumer preferences, regulatory conditions, and logistical frameworks.

Additionally, potential biases in participant responses and the interpretation of qualitative data could limit the generalizability of the conclusions. Future research should include quantitative studies to validate these findings across wider markets, longitudinal studies to assess the long-term sustainability of international expansion efforts, and comparative analyses of other Japanese culinary exports.

Further application of SWOT analysis could integrate interview and market research outcomes to formulate strategic recommendations for establishing authentic Sanuki Udon restaurants overseas. Exploring digital marketing approaches, advancements in production technology, and cross-cultural consumer education would also deepen the understanding of globalizing udon cuisine.

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