

Experiential Marketing and Generation Z Customer Loyalty in Culinary MSMEs

Lalitya Paramartha¹, Roslina², & Faila Shofa³

¹²³Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, University Lampung, Indonesia

Email: lalityaprmrtha@gmail.com

Abstract

The increasing competition in the culinary industry has encouraged business owners to focus not only on product quality and pricing strategies, but also on creating memorable customer experiences. This research seeks to examine the influence of experiential marketing dimensions composed of sense, feel, think, act, and relate toward Generation Z customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs. The research applied a quantitative approach using a survey method through questionnaire distribution to respondents selected through purposive sampling. The study utilized multiple linear regression to examine the collected data following the fulfillment of validity, reliability, and classical assumption requirements. The results demonstrate that all dimensions of experiential marketing indicate positive and significant effects on customer loyalty. Among the five dimensions, feel emerged as the most dominant factor affecting customer loyalty, while act showed the lowest effect. The findings also reveal that Generation Z customer loyalty tends to be stronger at the conative loyalty stage than at the action loyalty stage. Furthermore, experiential marketing contributed substantially to customer loyalty, while the remaining percentage was affected by other variables beyond the scope of this study. The findings support the experiential marketing concept introduced by Schmitt (1999) and the experiential value theory developed by Holbrook (1999), particularly within the context of local culinary MSMEs. This research suggests that culinary business owners should strengthen emotional experiences, customer engagement, and social interaction to maintain sustainable customer loyalty.

Keywords: experiential marketing, customer loyalty, Generation Z, culinary MSMEs, consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing competition in the culinary industry has encouraged business owners to compete not only through product quality and pricing strategies, but also through the ability to create memorable customer experiences. In recent years, changes in consumer behavior have become increasingly visible, particularly among Generation Z consumers who tend to prioritize emotional engagement, social interaction, and consumption experiences over purely functional product attributes. Consumers no longer evaluate culinary brands solely based on taste and price, but also through the atmosphere of the place, service quality, visual presentation, and emotional experiences obtained during the consumption process (Schmitt, 1999). This phenomenon has positioned experiential marketing as one of the most relevant marketing approaches in building customer loyalty within the culinary sector.

The rapid growth of culinary MSMEs has also intensified competition among business owners. Culinary businesses are required to create distinctive and memorable experiences to maintain consumer interest and loyalty. Empirical realities in society indicate that Generation Z consumers remain highly connected to online platforms and social media, in which consumption experiences are frequently shared and affect purchasing decisions (Kotler et al., 2021). Attractive dining experiences, interactive services, and emotional connections with brands have become important factors influencing consumer preferences. Consequently, culinary MSMEs need to recognize how experiential marketing affects customer loyalty, especially among Generation Z consumers who are highly oriented toward experiences.

Schmitt (1999) stated that experiential marketing consists of five dimensions, namely sense, feel, think, act, and relate. These dimensions create customer experiences through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social responses. Sense refers to sensory experiences acquired through sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Feel emphasizes emotional experiences and affective responses generated during the consumption process. Think focuses on cognitive stimulation and creativity, while act refers to behavioral experiences and consumer involvement with brands. Relate concerns social experiences and consumers' connections with communities or groups associated with a brand. Through these dimensions, experiential marketing is considered capable of strengthening emotional attachment and sustainable relationships between consumers and brands.

In relation to customer loyalty, Oliver (1999) explained that loyalty is formed across several stages, including cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty, and action commitment. Customer commitment not only reflects repurchase intention, but also emotional commitment and behavioral attachment toward a brand. Among Generation Z consumers, loyalty is strongly associated with emotional satisfaction, social interaction, and memorable consumption experiences. Consumers who experience positive emotional engagement

toward a brand tend to maintain sustainable relationships as well as recommend the brand to others.

Several previous studies have demonstrated that experiential marketing significantly influences customer loyalty. Muljani (2021) found that experiential marketing positively affected restaurant customer loyalty. Chen and Wu (2022) also revealed that emotional and service experiences significantly influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, Siagian et al. (2023) demonstrated that experiential marketing significantly influenced restaurant customer loyalty through customer trust. These studies indicate that customer experience contributes significantly to strengthening customer attachment to brands within the culinary industry.

However, previous findings regarding the relationship between experiential marketing and customer loyalty remain inconsistent. Chang (2020) found that experiential marketing did not directly affect brand loyalty, but instead required brand image as a mediating variable. These inconsistent findings highlight a research gap regarding the immediate impact of experiential marketing on customer loyalty, particularly within local culinary MSMEs and Generation Z consumers. In addition, most previous studies focused on large restaurants or franchise businesses, while studies examining local culinary MSMEs remain relatively limited. This condition indicates that further research is needed to examine how experiential marketing dimensions affect customer loyalty in local culinary businesses.

This study was conducted at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung, a local culinary MSME whose dominant customer segment consists of Generation Z consumers. The study concentrates on examining whether experiential marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate significantly affect Generation Z customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to examine the effect of experiential marketing dimensions toward customer loyalty and identify the most dominant dimension contributing to loyalty formation among Generation Z consumers.

The findings of this research are expected to offer theoretical contributions toward the development of experiential marketing and customer loyalty literature, especially within the setting of local culinary MSMEs. Practically, the findings are expected to offer insights for culinary business owners in designing experience-based marketing strategies capable of strengthening emotional engagement, social interaction, and long-term customer loyalty. Drawing from the theoretical framework alongside previous research findings, this research formulates the hypothesis stating experiential marketing dimensions composed of sense, feel, think, act, and relate significantly affect Generation Z customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Experiential marketing represents a marketing approach which highlights customer experience as an important factor in building relationships between consumers and brands. The concept was introduced by Schmitt (1999), who argued that consumers no longer evaluate products and services solely based on functional benefits, but also through emotional, sensory, cognitive, behavioral, and social experiences obtained during the consumption process. Experiential marketing therefore focuses on creating memorable experiences capable of strengthening consumers' emotional attachment and long-term relationships with brands (Schmitt, 1999). In this study, experiential marketing serves as the primary theoretical foundation used to examine customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers in culinary MSMEs.

Schmitt (1999) stated that experiential marketing is composed of five dimensions, including sense, feel, think, act, and relate. Sense refers to sensory experiences acquired through sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Feel relates to emotional experiences and affective responses generated during consumption activities. Think focuses on cognitive stimulation that encourages creativity and curiosity among consumers. Act refers to behavioral experiences and consumer involvement with brands, while relate concerns social experiences and consumers' relationships with communities associated with brands. These dimensions represent the operational aspects of experiential marketing concepts and are used in the research as indicators for measuring customer experiences in the culinary sector.

The implementation of experiential marketing theory in this research is adjusted to the context of culinary MSMEs dominated by Generation Z consumers. This context is considered important because Generation Z consumers tend to prioritize emotional engagement, social interaction, and experience-oriented consumption patterns rather than purely functional product attributes. Therefore, this study gives greater emphasis to emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions, as these aspects are regarded as more relevant in explaining customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers in the culinary industry. The adaptation of the theory to this setting enables the study to examine experiential marketing more specifically within local culinary MSMEs.

Holbrook (1999) through experiential value theory explained that consumption experiences generate emotional, hedonic, and social values capable of influencing consumers' perceptions and evaluations toward brands. Positive experiences create emotional attachment, increase customer satisfaction, and encourage repurchase behaviour Holbrook (1999). Within the scope of this research, experiential value theory supports the assumption that memorable customer activities support the development of long-term customer commitment among Generation Z consumers.

Customer loyalty in this study is explained using Oliver's (1999) loyalty theory, which explains that loyalty develops through several stages, including cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty, and action loyalty. Cognitive loyalty emerges from consumers' awareness and evaluation of brand performance, whereas affective loyalty develops through emotional attachment toward brands. Conative loyalty represents consumers' intention for repeated purchases, while action loyalty reflects actual purchasing behavior and active customer involvement with brands. This study focuses primarily on conative loyalty and action loyalty because both dimensions are considered more relevant for measuring behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in culinary MSMEs.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the association between experiential marketing and customer loyalty. Muljani (2021) found that experiential marketing positively affected restaurant customer loyalty. Chen and Wu (2022) also revealed that emotional and service experiences significantly affected customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, Siagian et al. (2023) demonstrated that experiential marketing significantly influenced restaurant customer loyalty through customer trust. However, Chang (2020) found that experiential marketing did not directly affect brand loyalty and required brand image as a mediating variable. These inconsistent findings suggest that additional research regarding the relationship involving experiential marketing and customer commitment is still necessary, particularly within the context of local culinary MSMEs and Generation Z consumers.

The theoretical framework developed in this study serves as the foundation for the research methodology, particularly in determining the operational dimensions and indicators used in the research instrument. The dimensions of experiential marketing consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate are applied to measure customer experiences, while customer loyalty is measured through conative loyalty and action loyalty dimensions. Drawing from the theoretical framework alongside previous research findings, this research formulates the hypothesis that experience-based marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate significantly influence Generation Z consumer commitment in culinary MSMEs.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design for examining the effect of experiential marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate on Generation Z customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs. A numerical approach was considered suitable since the study intended to measure associations among variables objectively using statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2022).

610

Setting and Study Population

The study was conducted at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung, a local culinary MSME whose dominant consumers belong to Generation Z. The study population consisted of Generation Z consumers who had previously purchased products from Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung. The population in this study was categorized as an infinite population because the exact number of Generation Z consumers who made direct purchases at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung could not be identified specifically. The population was considered relevant to the study because Generation Z consumers tend to prioritize emotional engagement, social interaction, and experience-based consumption patterns, which are closely related to the implementation of experiential marketing in the culinary sector. The research was conducted during the 2025 study period.

Sampling Technique and Procedure

Purposive sampling was applied to determine respondents from the target population. The research sample included 210 respondents aged 17–29 years who had purchased products from Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung at least twice. The use of purposive sampling was considered suitable because the study required respondents with adequate consumption experience and the ability to evaluate the experiential marketing dimensions implemented by the culinary business.

Instruments

This study utilized a well-structured questionnaire as the main tool utilized for collecting responses. Experiential marketing was assessed using the dimensions developed according to Schmitt (1999), namely sense, affect, think, act, and relate. The dimensions of experiential marketing indicators covered sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social experiences. Customer loyalty was evaluated using the loyalty dimensions proposed by Oliver (1999), particularly conative loyalty and action loyalty. All questionnaire items employed a Likert scale consisting of five points extending ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

Before conducting statistical analysis, the study carried out validity and reliability assessment to verify consistency and accuracy regarding the research instruments. Reliability findings indicated that the sense dimension recorded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.824, feel reached 0.828, think obtained 0.832, act recorded 0.825, and relate achieved 0.856. Meanwhile, the customer loyalty variable produced a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.839. The findings indicate that all research variables were highly reliable and suitable for data collection.

Data Collection

Data collection involved both direct and online questionnaire distribution to respondents who met the research criteria. Respondents received information details about the study objectives and confidentiality concerning their responses for academic purposes only. The questionnaires targeted Generation Z consumers who had purchased products from Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung at least twice. In total, 210 valid questionnaires were successfully collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 was utilized to process the collected data. Descriptive statistics described respondent characteristics, while inferential statistics tested the proposed hypothesis. Multiple linear regression analysis examined the impact generated by experiential marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate on customer loyalty. Prior to hypothesis testing, the study performed validity and reliability tests followed by a normality test to confirm the suitability and accuracy of the regression model. The study also applied t-tests and coefficient of determination analysis to evaluate the proposed hypothesis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	118	43.8
	Male	92	56.2
Age	18–20 years	50	23.8
	21–23 years	75	35.7
	24–26 years	49	23.3
	27–29 years	36	17.2
Total		210	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Most respondents were female, representing 56.2% across the total sample, while the proportion of male respondents accounted for 43.8%. Regarding age, the largest proportion of respondents was within the age range of 21 and 23 years old, comprising 35.7% of the overall sample. These findings suggest that consumers of Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung are predominantly Generation Z individuals with strong interest in experience-based consumption activities, particularly in the culinary sector.

Hypothesis Testing

The research proposed that experiential marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate significantly affect Generation Z customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs. The hypothesis underwent testing through multiple linear regression analysis, and the findings are presented in Tables 2a–2c.

Table 2a: Model Summary of Experiential Marketing on Customer Loyalty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.767 ^a	.589	.578	1.785

Table 2b: Significance Test of Experiential Marketing Dimensions on Customer Loyalty

Variable	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig.
Sense	.367	8.112	.001
Feel	.395	8.764	.001
Think	.337	7.419	.001
Act	.316	6.940	.001
Relate	.330	7.300	.001

Table 2c: Coefficients Predicting Customer Loyalty from Experiential Marketing Dimensions

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.272	1.348		0.944	.001
Sense	.405	.050	.367	8.112	.001
Feel	.431	.049	.395	8.764	.001
Think	.354	.048	.337	7.419	.001
Act	.361	.052	.316	6.940	.001
Relate	.364	.050	.330	7.300	.001

Tables 2a–2c display the findings obtained from multiple linear regression analysis examining the effect generated by experiential marketing dimensions influencing customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung. The findings reveal

that experiential marketing dimensions consisting of sense, feel, think, act, and relate significantly affected customer loyalty, with an R^2 value of 0.589. The findings reveal that 58.9% of the variation in customer loyalty was explained by experiential marketing dimensions, while the remaining 41.1% was influenced by other variables beyond the scope of this study.

The regression analysis further demonstrates the result showing that all experiential marketing dimensions positively and significantly affected customer loyalty. The feel dimension recorded the highest standardized beta coefficient of 0.395 ($t = 8.764$, $p < .001$), indicating that emotional experiences had the greatest influence on Generation Z customer loyalty. The sense dimension also produced a significant positive effect with a beta coefficient of 0.367 ($t = 8.112$, $p < .001$), followed by think with a beta coefficient of 0.337 ($t = 7.419$, $p < .001$), relate with a beta coefficient of 0.330 ($t = 7.300$, $p < .001$), and act with a beta coefficient of 0.316 ($t = 6.940$, $p < .001$). Although the act dimension recorded the lowest coefficient among all variables, the effect remained statistically significant.

These findings suggest that experiential marketing plays an important role in strengthening customer loyalty within the culinary sector (Schmitt, 1999), particularly among Generation Z consumers who prioritize emotional engagement, memorable experiences, and social interaction during the consumption process. The findings also support the proposed hypothesis that experiential marketing dimensions have significant effects on customer loyalty

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that all experience-based marketing dimensions composed of sense, feel, think, act, and relate showed meaningful and significant impacts regarding customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung. The regression analysis identified the feel dimension as the primary predictor contributing to customer loyalty, whereas the act variable produced the lowest influence among all experiential marketing dimensions. These results suggest that emotional experiences contribute more strongly to customer loyalty formation than behavioral involvement in brand activities.

The positive influence of the sense dimension indicates that sensory experiences such as food presentation, store atmosphere, aroma, and visual appearance contributed to strengthening customer loyalty. Generation Z consumers generally pay close attention to visual and sensory experiences during the consumption process (Kotler et al., 2021), because these experiences create comfort and positive perceptions toward the brand. This finding supports Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing theory, which explains that sensory stimulation can create memorable consumption experiences and strengthen emotional attachment between consumers and brands. The result also aligns with previous studies

614

reporting that sensory experiences positively influence consumer preference and repurchase behavior in the culinary industry.

The feel dimension emerged as the main contributor to customer commitment. Emotional experiences created through friendly service, enjoyable interactions, and comfortable consumption experiences strengthened consumers' emotional attachment toward Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung. This finding indicates that Generation Z consumers prioritize emotional comfort and positive experiences during the consumption process Chen and Wu (2022). The result is consistent with Chen and Wu (2022), who found that emotional experiences strongly influence customer satisfaction as well as loyalty. However, the present study specifically demonstrates that emotional experiences directly influence customer loyalty within local culinary MSMEs dominated by Generation Z consumers.

The think dimension also showed a meaningful and statistically significant effect toward customer loyalty. Consumers who perceived unique concepts, attractive promotions, and creative consumption experiences tended to develop stronger positive evaluations toward the brand. This finding suggests that cognitive stimulation contributes to strengthening customer loyalty because consumers become more interested and emotionally connected to the overall brand experience. The result further strengthens experiential marketing theory, which explains that innovative and creative experiences encourage consumers to develop stronger long-term relationships with brands.

Furthermore, the act dimension produced the lowest influence among all experiential marketing dimensions, although the effect remained statistically significant. This result indicates that consumer participation and behavioral involvement in brand activities were still relatively limited. Most consumers tended to position themselves as product users rather than active participants in brand-related activities. This finding differs from several previous studies emphasizing the importance of behavioral engagement in strengthening customer loyalty. In this study, emotional and sensory experiences appeared to contribute more strongly than behavioral experiences. The finding also reflects the characteristics of Generation Z consumers, who generally prioritize enjoyable and emotionally meaningful experiences over direct participation in brand activities.

The relate dimension also positively influenced customer loyalty. Social experiences and consumers' connections with communities associated with the brand strengthened consumers' sense of belonging and emotional attachment. Generation Z consumers generally prefer brands capable of creating social interaction and shareable experiences Siagian et al. (2023). This finding supports previous studies indicating that social engagement and community relationships contribute to strengthening long-term customer loyalty.

Overall, the findings strengthen Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing theory, which emphasizes that sensory-based, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social experiences contribute to customer loyalty formation. The present research also helps address inconsistencies identified in previous findings regarding the association involving experiential marketing and customer loyalty. Unlike Chang (2020), who found that experiential marketing did not directly influence brand loyalty, this study demonstrates experiential marketing dimensions significantly influenced customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers in local culinary MSMEs. These findings indicate that experiential marketing strategies remain highly relevant for strengthening customer loyalty, particularly in businesses targeting young consumers with experience-based consumption characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research demonstrate that experiential marketing dimensions, namely sense, feel, think, act, and relate, positively influenced customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers at Mie Goyang Palapa Lampung. The feel dimension became the primary factor affecting customer commitment, suggesting that emotional experiences played the most important role in strengthening consumer attachment toward the brand.

The study reinforces the experiential marketing framework proposed by Schmitt (1999), explaining that sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social experiences play important roles in developing customer loyalty. The findings also provide empirical evidence that experiential marketing directly affected customer loyalty in the context of local culinary MSMEs dominated by Generation Z consumers.

Recommendations

Culinary business owners are encouraged to strengthen emotional engagement, improve service quality, and create memorable consumption experiences to maintain customer loyalty among Generation Z consumers. Businesses are also advised to develop interactive and experience-based marketing activities to increase consumer involvement with the brand. Future researchers are recommended to examine other variables including customer satisfaction, brand image, and customer engagement to provide broader insights into customer loyalty in culinary MSMEs.

Limitations and suggestions for further study

This study focused only on one culinary MSME in Lampung and involved Generation Z consumers as the primary respondents, limiting the generalization of the findings to different business sectors or consumer groups. In addition, the study examined only

616

experiential marketing dimensions without including other factors that may affect customer loyalty, including factors like consumer satisfaction, brand image, and customer engagement.

Future studies are expected to involve broader business sectors, larger sample sizes, and additional variables related to consumer behavior. Further research may also examine intervening or moderating effects of factors including brand image, consumer satisfaction, and digital engagement to obtain a broader understanding regarding customer loyalty in experience-based consumption contexts.

REFERENCES

- Chang, Y. H. (2020). The effect of experiential marketing on brand loyalty through brand image in the food and beverage industry. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(10), 549–558.
- Chen, C. F., & Wu, C. H. (2022). The influence of emotional experience on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the restaurant industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 103–112.
- Holbrook, M. B. (1999). *Consumer value: A framework for analysis and research*. Routledge.
- Muljani, N. (2021). The effect of experiential marketing on restaurant customer loyalty. *Jurnal Manajemen Pemasaran*, 15(2), 85–94.
- Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2021). *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*. Wiley.
- Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4), 33–44.
- Schmitt, B. H. (1999). *Experiential marketing: How to get customers to sense, feel, think, act, and relate to your company and brands*. The Free Press.
- Siagian, H., Cahyono, E., & Wijaya, S. (2023). Experiential marketing and customer loyalty in the restaurant industry through customer trust. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 5(1), 44–53.
- Sugiyono. (2022). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.