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Exploring drivers of customer loyalty in themed Korean cuisine: insights from the developing Korean restaurant industry in Makassar, Indonesia

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Sensory experiences and digital communication increasingly shape how visitors perceive, evaluate, and revisit tourism and hospitality venues. In themed restaurants, visitor experiences are co-constructed through social media communication and multisensory in-store environments. This study examines the influence of social media marketing (SMM) and sensory marketing (SM) on revisit intention, with customer satisfaction as a mediating mechanism, using data from Korean restaurants in the United States. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Experience Economy Theory, and the Stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework, this study proposes an integrated model that explains how communicative and sensory stimuli jointly shape cognitive–affective responses and behavioral outcomes. Data from 175 restaurant visitors were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS). The findings show that both SMM and SM significantly influence revisit intention directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction, with sensory marketing having the strongest total effect. The results highlight the importance of aligning digital communication with embodied sensory experiences to enhance visitor satisfaction and loyalty, offering a transferable framework for understanding experience-mediated communication in the tourism and hospitality settings.

KEYWORDS

digital–sensory integration, experiential communication, revisit behavior, themed dining experiences, visitor satisfaction mechanisms

1 Introduction

The rapid transformation of the global food and hospitality sector has intensified competition among restaurants, especially those offering culturally themed dining experiences. As experiential consumption becomes increasingly central to customer decision-making, restaurants must differentiate themselves through innovative approaches

that create memorable and emotionally resonant experiences for their customers. In this context, sensory-rich, immersive, and culturally themed environments have emerged as key drivers of customer engagement, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty. Within tourism and hospitality research, such experiences are widely recognized as essential components of visitor behavior and destination development (Agapito et al., 2014; Packer and Ballantyne, 2016).

In today's digital age, the quality of sensory and experiential encounters is further amplified by social media, where visitors actively share "moments" that influence destination attractiveness and shape collective perceptions (Wengel et al., 2022). Gastronomic tourism research also highlights that food-based experiences—particularly those emphasizing cultural immersion and multi-sensory engagement—significantly contribute to place attachment, tourist memory, and revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012; Kleinhans et al., 2021). These insights are particularly relevant for themed restaurants, which function not only as dining venues but also as cultural micro-destinations where authenticity, atmosphere, and storytelling co-create consumer journeys.

Indonesia's culinary landscape reflects these global dynamics. Cities such as Makassar have witnessed a rapid surge in culturally themed restaurants, driven by shifting consumer preferences for experiential dining. Restaurant records indicate an 81% increase in registered establishments between 2021 and 2022, with Korean restaurants being among the fastest-growing segments (Idris et al., 2023). Their popularity is strongly influenced by the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which has increased the demand for immersive settings that combine cuisine, décor, music, and symbolic aesthetics (Anuntapong and Kim, 2021; Jin, 2019). Consequently, Korean restaurants in Makassar operate not only as food outlets but also as lifestyle spaces where visitors pursue cultural consumption, social interaction, and entertainment, mirroring global trends in gastronomic tourism and experience design.

Despite this growth, many Korean-themed restaurants face challenges in sustaining customer loyalty because of the inconsistent application of integrated marketing strategies. Research has shown that social media marketing (SMM) and sensory marketing (SM) are two critical determinants of visitor satisfaction and revisit intention (Haritaoglu et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2021). However, prior studies often examine these strategies independently, overlooking how their interaction shapes holistic visitor experiences, particularly within themed or tourism-oriented restaurants. This gap is significant because multisensory cues affect not only immediate satisfaction but also memory formation, emotional connection, and perceived authenticity, all of which influence loyalty and return visits (Agapito, 2020; Lv et al., 2020).

Multiple theoretical lenses support the conceptual foundation for understanding such experiences. Visitor experience theory emphasizes that individuals form subjective, emotional, and multisensory responses during encounters outside their everyday environment (Packer and Ballantyne, 2016). The Experience Economy suggests that sensory stimulation enhances value creation by transforming ordinary services into memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The Stimulus–organism–response (SOR) framework further explains how sensory and digital stimuli affect internal states (e.g., satisfaction and emotions), which then trigger

behavioral responses such as revisit intention (Jung et al., 2021). Within gastronomic tourism studies, sensory experiences are recognized as central to building place identity, strengthening visitor attachment, and encouraging repeat visits (Kim et al., 2020).

This study advances tourism and hospitality research by proposing an integrated perspective on customer loyalty in themed dining contexts, where digital communication and multi-sensory experiences jointly shape visitor behavior. Experiential consumption and sensory engagement are central to how visitors evaluate, remember, and revisit hospitality venues (Agapito et al., 2014; Packer and Ballantyne, 2016; Pine and Gilmore, 1998), whereas social media functions as a key communicative space shaping expectations and shared perceptions (Kim et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). By integrating the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Experience Economy Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, this study conceptualizes themed restaurants as experiential micro-destinations where digital narratives and sensory environments interact to influence customer satisfaction and revisit intention, offering a more holistic explanation of loyalty formation in experience-driven tourism and hospitality settings.

This study's primary objective is to examine the interplay between social media marketing (SMM) and sensory marketing (SM) in shaping customer satisfaction and revisit intention in Korean-themed restaurants in Makassar, Indonesia. This research contributes to the literature by (1) Incorporating tourism-oriented perspectives on sensory experiences and visitor behavior, (2) positioning themed restaurants as cultural and gastronomic micro-destinations, and (3) integrating digital and sensory elements within a unified marketing framework relevant to modern experiential dining environments.

This approach advances the theoretical understanding while offering practical insights for restaurant managers, destination developers, and tourism stakeholders seeking to enhance culinary-based visitor experiences and foster sustainable customer loyalty.

2 Review literature and hypothesis development

This research draws on the Uses Gratifications (Katz et al., 1973), Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theories by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Jung et al., 2021). Consumers utilize social media to fulfill their information (e.g., menu viewing) and entertainment (e.g., interactive content) needs, thereby increasing positive perceptions of the restaurant. In addition, the phenomenon where sensory marketing can increase consumer satisfaction can be attributed to the Experience Economy theory (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), where sensory experiences (aroma, sound, and touch) become the main differentiator in the culinary industry. In the context of Makassar, people tend to prioritize hands-on experience when choosing a restaurant, so physical factors such as seat comfort or food aroma are more influential than digital promotions. The mediating role of customer satisfaction indicates that satisfaction is not only a result of marketing strategies, but also a key determinant

of revisit intentions. This strengthens the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, where SMM and SM as a stimulus affect the organism (satisfaction), which then triggers a response (RI). Mehrabian and Russell proposed an S-O-R framework to account for external stimuli based on environmental factors that elicit individual cognitive and affective behaviors. Bagozzi in 1986 extended the S-O-R framework to explore consumer behavior in marketing (Bagozzi, 1986; Arora et al., 2020). By integrating these theories, this research offers a comprehensive view of how SMM and SM influence revisit intention with the mediation of customer satisfaction.

In today's digital age, the quality of sensory and experiential encounters is further amplified by social media, where visitors actively share "moments" that influence destination attractiveness and shape collective perceptions (Wengel et al., 2022). Gastronomic tourism research also highlights that food-based experiences—particularly those emphasizing cultural immersion and multi-sensory engagement—significantly contribute to place attachment, tourist memory, and revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012; Kleinhans et al., 2021). These insights are particularly relevant for themed restaurants, which function not only as dining venues but also as cultural micro-destinations where authenticity, atmosphere, and storytelling co-create consumer journeys.

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Building on the above insights, this study contributes to the literature by theoretically integrating Uses and Gratifications Theory, Experience Economy Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework to explain customer loyalty in themed dining environments. Existing studies often examine social media marketing or sensory marketing in isolation, despite evidence that visitor experiences are formed through the interaction of communicative, emotional, and sensory processes (Agapito, 2020; Lv et al., 2020). Uses and Gratifications Theory explains how consumers actively engage with social media to fulfill informational, entertainment, and social needs (Katz et al., 1973; Kim et al., 2020), while Experience Economy Theory emphasizes the role of multisensory stimulation in transforming services into memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The S-O-R framework further clarifies how these external stimuli influence internal evaluations, such as satisfaction, which subsequently drive behavioral responses including revisit intention (Arora et al., 2020; Jung et al., 2021). By combining these perspectives, the proposed framework captures the communicative and sensory mechanisms underlying loyalty formation in experiential tourism and hospitality contexts more comprehensively than single-theory approaches.

This study's primary objective is to examine the interplay between social media marketing (SMM) and sensory marketing (SM) in shaping customer satisfaction and revisit intention in Korean-themed restaurants in Makassar, Indonesia. This research contributes to the literature by (1) Incorporating tourism-oriented perspectives on sensory experiences and visitor behavior, (2) positioning themed restaurants as cultural and gastronomic micro-destinations, and (3) integrating digital and sensory elements within a unified marketing framework relevant to modern experiential dining environments.

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3 Methods

3.1 Study site

Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi Province, was selected as the study site because of its growing reputation as a culinary hub and its strategic importance in Indonesia's gastronomic tourism (Djunaidi and Gunari, 2022; Silaban et al., 2023). The city has witnessed rapid expansion in the restaurant industry, including a notable rise in Korean-themed dining establishments, reflecting the increasing local embrace of global culinary trends in recent years. As a metropolitan center rich in cultural diversity,

shaped by Bugis, Makassarese, Chinese, and Dutch influences, Makassar offers a unique setting to explore how consumers engage with themed dining experiences. Its blend of historical heritage, modern infrastructure, and dynamic food culture makes it an ideal location to investigate the intersection of social media marketing, sensory marketing, and consumer behavior in Korean restaurant settings.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographic location of Makassar City on the southwestern coast of Sulawesi Island, Indonesia, at approximately 58° south latitude and 119°5' east longitude. Bordered by the Gowa and Maros Districts to the north, the Takalar District to the south, and the Makassar Strait to the west, the city serves as a strategic gateway connecting eastern and western Indonesia. Characterized by mostly flat terrain with some hilly areas in the east, Makassar's coastal setting supports its role as a central hub for maritime trade, transportation, and tourism. Nearby islands like Samalona Island further enhance its appeal as a regional destination.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection was conducted over 3 months (August–October 2024) in Makassar City using purposive sampling, ensuring inclusivity by selecting respondents based on predefined criteria (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012). The sample included 175 individuals who had visited Korean restaurants in Makassar at least once in the past year, representing a comprehensive range of experiences that enriched our understanding of this subject. Using the Rule-of-Thumb method, a minimum sample size of 170 was determined based on 17 measurement indicators (Hair et al., 2017). The study conducted a pilot test to refine the questionnaire, ensuring clarity and reliability for all participants. Data were collected using a hybrid approach: 110 responses were obtained via Google Forms and 65 through in-person handouts at Korean restaurants. This inclusive method helped reach a broader demographic, including digitally active respondents and on-site diners, while enabling researchers to observe contextual sensory elements. The questionnaire measured constructs such as social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention using validated indicators from previous studies (Djunaidi and Gunari, 2022; El Sheikh et al., 2020; Huang, 2021; Silaban et al., 2023).

3.3 Data analysis

This study employs structural equation Modeling with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) to analyze the complex relationships between social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention. SEM-PLS, a method particularly suitable for exploratory research involving multiple constructs and indicators, offers analytical rigor and precision in evaluating direct and indirect effects (Hair et al., 2017). Using this method, this study effectively assessed the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the link between marketing strategies and revisit intention,

thus enhancing the reliability and validity of its findings. As illustrated in Figure 2, Social Media Marketing (X_1) and Sensory Marketing (X_2) influence Customer Satisfaction (Z), which in turn directly affects Revisit Intention (Y). This model underscores the interconnected nature of marketing activities, customer perception, and behavioral outcomes, providing a robust framework for understanding loyalty in themed dining contexts and assuring the quality of the research.

The analysis was conducted in two stages: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The measurement model evaluates the validity and reliability of indicators using metrics such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability. Discriminant validity was tested using cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criteria. The structural model examines the relationships between constructs, including the mediating role of customer satisfaction. To ensure the highest level of statistical rigor, we used the bootstrapping method to determine the significance of the path coefficients. Smart PLS 4.1 is used to assess R^2 for variance explained and Q^2 for predictive relevance. Combined with the bootstrapping method, this two-stage approach guarantees a thorough and reliable data analysis, instilling confidence in the results (Djunaidi and Gunari, 2022).

The following is the structural model equation (Inner Model) and measurement model equation (Outer Model):

$$Y_1 = \gamma_1 X_1 + \gamma_2 X_2 + \gamma_3 Z_1 + \zeta \quad (1)$$

$$Z_1 = \gamma_1 X_1 + \gamma_2 X_2 + \zeta \quad (2)$$

Description:

Y = Revisit intention

Z = Customer satisfaction

X1 = Social media marketing variable

X2 = Sensory marketing variable

X3 = Consumer satisfaction variable

γ_1 = Structural coefficient of social media marketing variable

γ_2 = Structural coefficient of sensory marketing variable

γ_3 = Structural coefficient of consumer satisfaction variable

ζ = Residual or standard error

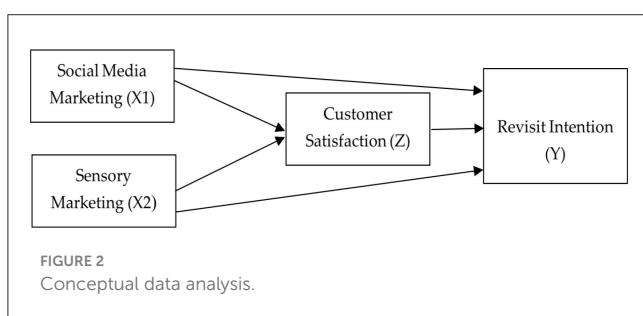
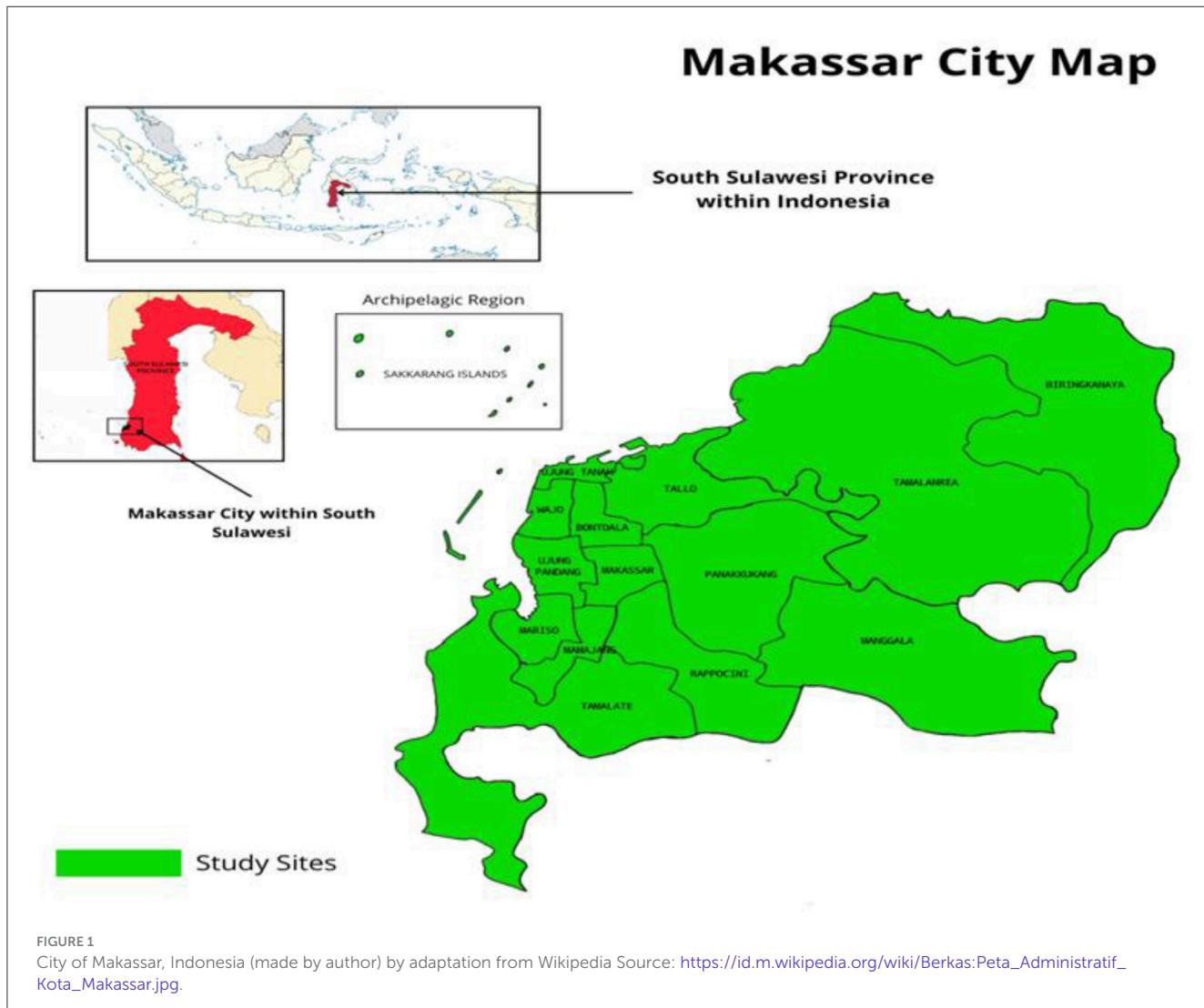
Outer Model Equation

- Social media marketing (SMM)

$$\begin{aligned} X1.1 &= \lambda X1.1 X_1 + \zeta X_1 \\ X1.2 &= \lambda X1.2 X_1 + \zeta X_1 \\ X1.3 &= \lambda X1.3 X_1 + \zeta X_1 \\ X1.4 &= \lambda X1.4 X_1 + \zeta X_1 \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

- Sensory marketing (SM)

$$\begin{aligned} X2.1 &= \lambda X2.1 X_2 + \zeta X_2 \\ X2.2 &= \lambda X2.2 X_2 + \zeta X_2 \\ X2.3 &= \lambda X2.3 X_2 + \zeta X_2 \\ X2.4 &= \lambda X2.4 X_2 + \zeta X_2 \\ X2.5 &= \lambda X2.5 X_2 + \zeta X_2 \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$



- Customer satisfaction (CS)

$$\begin{aligned}
 Z1.1 &= \lambda Z1.1 Z1 + \zeta Z1 \\
 Z1.2 &= \lambda Z1.2 Z1 + \zeta Z1 \\
 Z1.3 &= \lambda Z1.3 Z1 + \zeta Z1 \\
 Z1.4 &= \lambda Z1.4 Z1 + \zeta Z1
 \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

- Revisit intention (RI)

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y1.1 &= \lambda Z1.1 Y1 + \zeta Y1 \\
 Y1.2 &= \lambda Z1.2 Y1 + \zeta Y1 \\
 Y1.3 &= \lambda Z1.3 Y1 + \zeta Y1 \\
 Y1.4 &= \lambda Y1.4 Y1 + \zeta Y1
 \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

Description:

$\lambda X1, \lambda X2, \lambda X3, \dots$ = Factor coefficients for indicators on each construct.

ζ = Error or residual on each construct.

Table 1 presents the research variables and measurement instruments used in this study. It outlines the latent constructs—Social Media Marketing (X1), Sensory Marketing (X2), Customer Satisfaction (Z1), and Revisit Intention (Y1)—and their corresponding indicator variables. All indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), allowing respondents to express the degree of their agreement with each statement.

TABLE 1 Research variables, indicator items, and measurement scale.

Variables	Instrument variable	Data (Likert scale)
Social media marketing (X1)	Content creation (X1.1) Content sharing (X1.2) Connecting (X1.3) Community building (X1.4)	5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree
Sensory marketing (X2)	Sight (X2.1) Smell (X2.2) Sound (X2.3) Touch (X2.4) Taste (X2.5)	5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree
Customer satisfaction (Z1)	Product quality (Z1.1) Service quality (Z1.2) Emotional factors (Z1.3) Price (Z1.4)	5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree
Revisit intention (Y1)	Willingness to visit again (Y1.1) Willingness to invite (Y1.2) Willingness to positive tale (Y1.3) Willingness to place the visiting destination in priority (Y1.4)	5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = neutral 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

4 Results

4.1 Measurement model (outer model)

The measurement model confirms that all constructs—social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention—are valid, reliable, and distinct. The indicators consistently represent each construct, capturing the underlying concepts effectively. This ensures a robust model, providing a solid foundation to explore how marketing strategies influence satisfaction and revisit intention in Korean restaurants in Makassar.

Figure 3 presents the measurement model evaluation, confirming the validity and reliability of the study's constructs—social media marketing (X1), sensory marketing (X2), customer satisfaction (Z), and revisit intention (Y1). All indicators showed outer loadings above 0.7, indicating strong reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed with AVE values exceeding 0.5, meaning each construct explained over half the variance of its indicators. Discriminant validity was supported by cross-loading values and the Fornell-Larcker criterion, showing that each construct was distinct. These results demonstrate that the model reliably captures the intended concepts and is well-suited for analyzing the structural relationships in the study.

The study involved 175 respondents who had visited Korean-themed restaurants in Makassar City, with the sample predominantly composed of female participants (75.5%) and individuals in the early adulthood age group (18–22 years). This demographic profile reflects the dominant consumer segment engaging in themed and culturally oriented dining experiences in urban Indonesia. Prior research suggests that younger consumers, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, demonstrate a higher level of openness toward foreign cultures, international

cuisines, and global food trends, driven by cultural curiosity, media exposure, and social identity (Balraj, 2024). Studies in tourism and hospitality also indicate that younger visitors are more inclined to seek experiential consumption and culturally immersive food experiences, making them a relevant group for examining loyalty formation in themed dining experiences. While the concentration of younger and female respondents may limit broader generalization, it remains analytically appropriate given the study's focus on experiential dining and digitally mediated consumption behavior.

Table 2 indicates that all constructs exhibit acceptable measurement properties, as reflected by factor loading values, Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha, which largely exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70. Most indicators demonstrated satisfactory factor loadings, confirming adequate convergent validity, with the exception of one indicator in the revisit intention construct (Y1.4), which failed to meet the minimum criterion and was therefore considered invalid. The Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.850 to 0.900, while Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.735 and 0.861, indicating strong internal consistency across all constructs. Overall, these findings confirm that the measurement model is reliable and valid, providing a solid foundation for subsequent structural analysis using the SEM-PLS method.

The discriminant validity assessment for the measurement indicators used the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion. The results indicate that each set of indicators captures a distinct construct, with no evidence of conceptual overlap among social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, or revisit intention. This confirms that the indicators are appropriately specified and measure the different theoretical concepts as intended by the authors. Overall, the findings support the adequacy of the measurement model and its suitability for further structural analysis using the SEM-PLS approach.

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity assessment using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion. All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating that the indicators used to measure social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention were empirically distinct. The highest HTMT value was observed between social media marketing and sensory marketing (0.80), which remains within acceptable limits and reflects their related but non-overlapping roles. Overall, the results confirm adequate discriminant validity and support the suitability of the measurement model for the subsequent SEM-PLS analysis.

4.2 Structural model (inner model)

The structural model analysis confirms strong causal relationships between social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention. Both marketing strategies directly enhance satisfaction and revisit intention, with satisfaction also mediating. The model's high predictive power highlights the crucial role of customer satisfaction in the dynamic interaction between marketing efforts and consumer behavior in Korean restaurants. These findings emphasize the

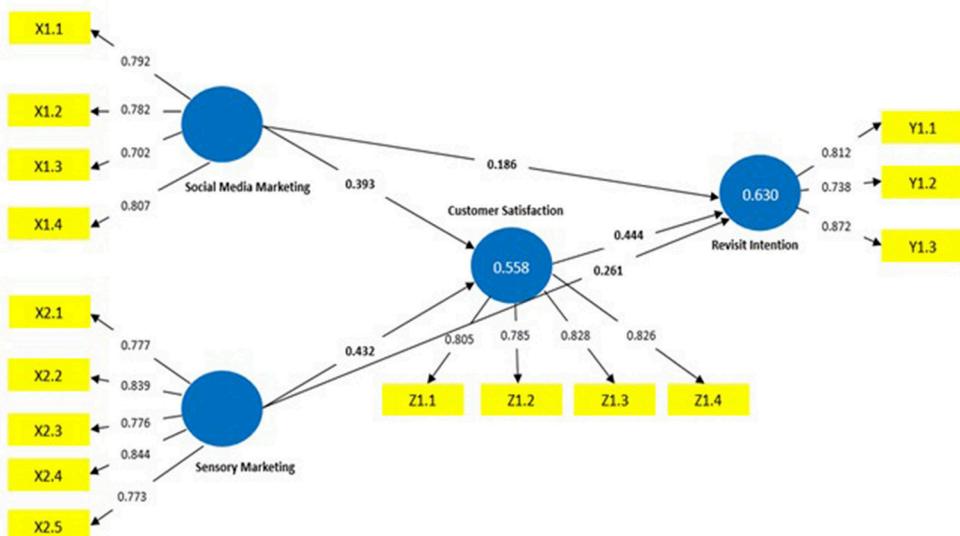


FIGURE 3
The influence of social media marketing (X1) and sensory marketing (X2) on revisit intention (Y) mediated by customer satisfaction (Z).

TABLE 2 Factor loadings and reliability analysis.

Variable	Indicator	Loadings factor	Criteria	Results	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Social media marketing (X1)	X1.1	0.792	>0.700	Valid	0.774	0.855
	X1.2	0.782	>0.700	Valid		
	X1.3	0.702	>0.700	Valid		
	X1.4	0.807	>0.700	Valid		
Sensory marketing (X2)	X2.1	0.777	>0.700	Valid	0.861	0.900
	X2.2	0.839	>0.700	Valid		
	X2.3	0.776	>0.700	Valid		
	X2.4	0.844	>0.700	Valid		
	X2.5	0.773	>0.700	Valid		
Customer satisfaction (Z1)	Z1.1	0.805	>0.700	Valid	0.827	0.885
	Z1.2	0.785	>0.700	Valid		
	Z1.3	0.828	>0.700	Valid		
	Z1.4	0.826	>0.700	Valid		
Revisit intention (Y1)	Y1.1	0.812	>0.700	Valid	0.735	0.850
	Y1.2	0.738	>0.700	Valid		
	Y1.3	0.872	>0.700	Valid		
	Y1.4	-0.149	<0.700	Not Valid		

importance of integrating digital and sensory strategies to improve customer experience and drive loyalty, offering practical insights for competitive marketing (El Sheikh et al., 2020).

Table 4 shows that the inner model analysis reliably captures the relationships between variables using the determinant coefficient (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and overall goodness of fit. Revisit intention and customer satisfaction are well-explained, with R^2 values of 0.630 and 0.558 and a combined coefficient of 0.596. The

model also has strong predictive power, as reflected by a Q^2 value of 0.836, explaining 83.6% of the data variance. These results confirm the model's robustness and support its use in analyzing the causal links among social media marketing, sensory marketing, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention.

The total calculation and VAF value help assess the mediation effect and determine which factors most influence revisit intention. This analysis clarifies whether customer satisfaction acts as a

TABLE 3 Discriminant validity HTMT ratios.

	Social media marketing	Sensory marketing	Revisit intention	Customer satisfaction
Social media marketing	–			
Sensory marketing	0.8	–		
Revisit intention	0.694	0.609	–	
Customer satisfaction	0.545	0.577	0.524	–

TABLE 4 Hypothesis test results.

Hypothesis		Path coefficient	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Conclusion
H1	Social media marketing → Customer satisfaction	0.393	5.367	0.000	Hypothesis supported
H2	Sensory marketing → Customer satisfaction	0.432	6.032	0.000	Hypothesis supported
H3	Sensory marketing → Revisit intention	0.261	3.240	0.001	Hypothesis supported
H4	Social media marketing → Revisit intention	0.186	2.353	0.019	Hypothesis supported
H5	Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.444	5.402	0.000	Hypothesis supported
H6	Social media marketing → Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.175	3.655	0.000	Hypothesis supported
H7	Sensory marketing → Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.192	4.625	0.000	Hypothesis supported

partial or full mediator between Social Media Marketing, Sensory Marketing, and Revisit intention. The findings highlight the importance of digital engagement and sensory experiences in enhancing customer loyalty in Korean restaurants in Makassar City.

Table 5 reveals that social media marketing (SMM) and sensory marketing (SM) significantly affect revisit intention through partial mediation by customer satisfaction, with VAF values of 48.5% for SMM and 42.4% for SM. This highlights the continued importance of direct effects from both strategies. Sensory marketing has the most substantial total effect (0.453), emphasizing how elements like ambience, music, and food presentation are key in driving return visits. These results highlight the need to enhance sensory experiences while maintaining strong social media engagement to boost customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.

including in Indonesia (Drianda et al., 2024; Jin, 2019; Lee, 2011; Ryoo, 2009). This growing fascination has led to a surge in Korean-themed dining establishments as consumers, especially teenagers and young adults, seek immersive experiences that combine food with cultural ambience (Suheryadi et al., 2023). By 2024, Makassar alone hosted over 20 Korean restaurants offering authentic cuisine accompanied by themed décor, music, and branding (Mujiya Ulkhaq et al., 2016; Rachman and Suryani, 2010). This reflects a growing emphasis on cultural relevance, digital engagement, and experiential marketing in the modern restaurant industry, where customer value is increasingly derived from culturally authentic themes, interactive social media engagement, and multi-sensory dining experiences rather than food attributes alone (Chemah et al., 2019; Haritaoglu et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2021; Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

This trend mirrors the global rise of Korean pop culture, which has gained traction across Asia, Europe, and the Americas (Kim et al., 2020). Backed by the Korean government as a soft power initiative, this cultural wave aims to boost Korea's global presence and promote its creative industries, including food and dining (Choi, 2023). The widespread appeal of Korean cultural products has influenced entertainment and transformed urban dining landscapes in countries like Indonesia. In this context, Korean restaurants serve as cultural hubs, blending global trends with local preferences. This study builds on prior work by showing how Korean restaurants in Makassar capitalize on Hallyu's global appeal and the local enthusiasm for themed

5 Discussion

5.1 The development of Korean restaurant

The development of Korean restaurants in Indonesia, particularly in urban centers like Makassar, reflects the sustained influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which has significantly shaped global consumer preferences and culinary trends. Hallyu—referring to the international popularity of South Korean cultural exports such as music, TV dramas, films, and cuisine—has spurred interest in Korean culture worldwide,

TABLE 5 Path coefficients and mediation effects of social media and sensory marketing on revisit intention.

Variable independent	Mediation	Dependent	Path coefficient			VAF	Conclusion
			Direct	Indirect	Total		
Social media marketing	Customer satisfaction	Revisit intention	0.186	0.175	0.361	0.485	Partial mediation
Sensory marketing	Customer satisfaction	Revisit intention	0.261	0.192	0.453	0.424	Partial mediation

dining. Beyond offering Korean cuisine, these restaurants reposition themselves as lifestyle destinations, combining sensory marketing with cultural storytelling.

5.2 The effect of social media marketing on customer satisfaction

This study confirms that social media marketing (SMM) significantly enhances customer satisfaction in themed Korean restaurants in Makassar, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.393 ($p < 0.05$). The most influential component was community-building, with a high loading factor of 0.807. Restaurants like Sogogi and Simhae have effectively built digital communities through Instagram by offering promotional content, cultural experiences, and interactive campaigns. These findings align with earlier research by [Rukman et al. \(2023\)](#), which reported that interactive digital communication increases satisfaction by strengthening emotional bonds between customers and brands. The application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory ([Katz et al., 1973](#)) supports this, positing that users engage with social media to fulfill needs such as entertainment, information, and social connection—factors that directly influence satisfaction.

This study reveals a gap in social media marketing (SMM) implementation, especially in relational engagement, as indicated by the low loading factor of the “connecting” indicator (0.702), which reflects limited interaction such as replying to comments or messages. Unlike earlier studies that view SMM as a uniform strategy, this research emphasizes the varied effects of its components. Prior work, particularly in coffee shops and retail, focused on content creation while overlooking two-way communication in themed restaurants ([Ibrahim et al., 2021](#)). This study extends the literature by showing that relational depth—not just promotional content—is critical for customer satisfaction and revisit intention in culturally immersive dining. Effective SMM must combine rich content with active engagement to build online communities that resonate with customer values and behavior.

In this study, Korean-themed restaurants are conceptualized as spaces of cultural consumption that integrate Korean cultural identity into the overall dining experience, rather than merely offering Korean cuisine. The classification was based on observable criteria, including menu consistency, visual and atmospheric cues, and non-culinary elements such as music and visual media. These criteria are well-suited for on-site surveys, where perceptions are formed through direct engagement with the physical environment. The findings confirm the central role of cultural and experiential elements, supporting a coherent interpretation of Korean-themed restaurants as integrated cultural experiences.

5.3 The effect of sensory marketing on customer satisfaction

The findings of this study demonstrate that sensory marketing (SM) significantly enhances customer satisfaction, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.432 ($p < 0.05$). This result aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of multi-sensory experiences in creating emotional engagement and satisfaction in dining contexts ([Chemah et al., 2019](#); [Haritaoglu et al., 2022](#)). These findings also support the Experience Economy theory ([Pine and Gilmore, 1998](#)), which argues that stimulating all five senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch—creates memorable and emotionally engaging customer experiences.

Among the five sensory dimensions, touch emerged as the most influential, with the highest loading factor (0.844), confirming prior research by [Silaban et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Utama \(2022\)](#) that tactile elements like comfortable seating, quality tableware, and room temperature significantly enhance customer satisfaction. However, sensory contributions varied; for instance, auditory elements were underutilized, aligning with [Haritaoglu et al. \(2022\)](#), who noted that sound is often overlooked despite its atmospheric impact. Taste, while essential, had a relatively lower loading factor (0.773), likely due to inconsistencies in buffet-style services. This study builds on previous work by offering a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how sensory marketing influences customer satisfaction in themed dining. Unlike earlier studies focused on isolated elements ([Mattila and Wirtz, 2001](#)), it highlights the importance of sensory coherence and cultural alignment. Consistent with ([Ha and Jang, 2010](#)), harmonized sensory experiences foster authenticity, emotional engagement, satisfaction, and customer loyalty which offering practical insights for enhancing themed restaurant strategies.

This study builds on previous work by offering a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how sensory marketing influences customer satisfaction in themed dining experiences. Unlike earlier studies that focused on isolated elements ([Mattila and Wirtz, 2001](#)), this study highlights the importance of sensory coherence and cultural alignment. Consistent with ([Ha and Jang, 2010](#)), harmonized sensory experiences foster authenticity, emotional engagement, satisfaction, and customer loyalty, offering practical insights into enhancing themed restaurant strategies.

5.4 The effect of social media marketing on revisit intention

The current study confirms that social media marketing (SMM) statistically affects revisit intention in the context of themed Korean

restaurants in Makassar, with a path coefficient of 0.18 ($p = 0.019$). This finding aligns with previous research by Ibrahim et al. (2021) who demonstrated that SMM fosters revisit intention by enhancing brand trust and emotional connection through content shared on platforms like Facebook. Similarly, Hidayah and Astuti (2023) found that social media activities such as promotional posts, storytelling, and user interaction significantly impact consumers' willingness to revisit cafes in Indonesia. However, the present study provides a more nuanced contribution by highlighting that while digital presence attracts attention, its effectiveness in generating repeat visits depends heavily on the alignment between online engagement and offline experiences.

This study highlights the mediating role of customer satisfaction in transforming social media engagement into revisit behavior. While earlier research often viewed social media marketing (SMM) as a direct driver of loyalty, the findings indicate that satisfaction is a crucial intermediary. Situmorang et al. (2020) emphasize that return visits depend on how well online expectations align with dining experiences. This aligns with broader research on themed dining, which shows that user-generated content (UGC) strongly influences trust and visit intention, especially among Gen Z tourists (Yamagishi et al., 2024). SMM also effectively boosts sales for restaurants with limited advertising budgets (Han et al., 2024). Additionally, cultural authenticity and emotional response—especially relevant in ethnic and upscale dining—shape perceived value and encourage return visits (Jang and Ha, 2015; Segson and Tan, 2018). Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) and Uses and Gratifications frameworks, these findings demonstrate how emotional engagement and perceived authenticity enhance the impact of SMM on revisit intention.

6 Conclusions and recommendation

This study shows that visitor loyalty in themed dining and experiential tourism contexts is shaped by the alignment of digital communication and multi-sensory experiences, with customer satisfaction acting as a key mediating mechanism. Social media marketing influences expectations and emotional engagement prior to the visit, whereas sensory marketing reinforces these expectations through immersive on-site experiences, jointly driving revisit intention. By integrating the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Experience Economy Theory, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study offers a holistic explanation of how communicative and sensory stimuli translate into behavioral outcomes. The findings suggest that destination managers and tourism authorities should adopt integrated strategies that align online storytelling, visual branding, and interactive communication with a coherent sensory design and cultural authenticity on site. Such alignment can enhance visitor satisfaction, build trust, and encourage repeated visits. Beyond themed restaurants, this integrated digital-sensory framework provides practical guidance for experience-driven tourism destinations seeking sustainable competitiveness and greater visitor loyalty.

7 Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the empirical analysis is based on data collected from Korean-themed restaurants in Makassar City, which reflects a specific urban, cultural, and market context shaped by local consumer preferences and the influence of the Korean Wave (Hallyu). As a result, the findings may not be fully generalisable to other cities or destinations with different levels of market maturity, cultural exposure, or competitive dynamics in themed dining. Second, the use of purposive sampling may limit the representativeness of the sample, as respondents were selected based on predefined criteria. Third, the cross-sectional research design captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time and therefore cannot account for changes in marketing strategies or customer behavior over time. Future research is encouraged to apply the proposed model across multiple cities or countries, adopt longitudinal or comparative designs, and incorporate additional contextual variables to further enhance the external validity and robustness of the findings.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Graduate School, University of Hasanuddin, Indonesia (Permit No. 08746/UN4.20.1/PT.01.04/2024). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin in accordance with the national legislation and institutional requirements.

Author contributions

NF: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Visualization, Writing – original draft. AM: Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. JB: Supervision, Writing – review & editing. RA: Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. NK: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. BN: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. RD: Conceptualization, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript. The author(s) declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation and revision of this manuscript. Specifically, AI assistance was employed to improve clarity, refine grammar,

and suggest structural edits to sections of the manuscript. All substantive content, data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were developed and validated by the author(s). The final manuscript has been thoroughly reviewed and approved by all authors to ensure accuracy, originality, and alignment with academic standards.

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