

Experiential Marketing in Building Consumer Loyalty and Engagement at Esenbi Café and Resto

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ABSTRACT

The culinary industry in Pangkal Pinang City faces increasingly intense competition, requiring local businesses to consistently manage customer experiences to retain consumers in a saturated market. This study aims to analyze the effect of experiential marketing on anticipation, consumer loyalty, and customer engagement, as well as the direct and mediating effects of anticipation on consumer loyalty and engagement at Esenbi Café and Resto. This study employs an explanatory quantitative approach designed to test causal relationships among latent constructs. The target population consists of consumers of Esenbi Café and Resto who are at least seventeen years of age and have visited the establishment at least twice. The sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique, resulting in a final sample size of 300 respondents. Primary data were collected through an online structured questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using variance-based Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The empirical findings demonstrate that all five proposed hypotheses are supported. Experiential marketing exerts a positive and significant direct effect on anticipation, customer engagement, and consumer loyalty. Furthermore, anticipation positively and significantly influences both customer engagement and consumer loyalty, while also acting as a robust mediating variable that bridges the relationship between customer experience and post-consumption behavioral outcomes. The structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power, accounting for 47.2 percent of the variance in consumer loyalty and 44.7 percent in customer engagement. These findings confirm that creating a holistic sensory and emotional experience not only directly fosters brand loyalty but also actively shapes pre-consumption expectations and enthusiasm that reinforce customer engagement. Practically, the results provide strategic insights for café management in designing competitive, experience-based marketing programs that leverage pre-visit anticipation to foster enduring customer relationships.

Keywords: Experiential marketing, anticipation, consumer loyalty, customer engagement, SEM-PLS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the Indonesian culinary industry has experienced significant growth. The food and beverage sector has emerged as a primary driver of the national economy, recording an average annual growth rate of 5.45 percent. The café and coffee shop business has contributed substantially to this expansion, evolving from mere places to consume beverages into dynamic spaces for social interaction, creative collaboration, and urban lifestyle expression. Today, customer visits to cafés are driven less by the functional purchase of goods and more by the pursuit of engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable experiences.

In Pangkal Pinang City, the local café ecosystem has expanded rapidly over the past five years, reflecting the rise of the creative economy and shifting consumption patterns among the productive-age demographic. Local cafés in Pangkal Pinang cultivate aesthetically pleasing and comfortable atmospheres, providing spaces for remote work and social gatherings while serving as venues for live music performances and community events. Young consumers aged 18 to 35 no longer evaluate cafés solely on product quality; instead, they prioritize experience-based value, which encompasses spatial comfort, service excellence, brand image, and opportunities for digital self-expression on social media.

The concept of experiential marketing focuses on creating experiential value that establishes deep emotional bonds between consumers and brands. Schmitt (1999) posited that experiential marketing creates holistic experiences by stimulating five strategic experiential modules: Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the integrated implementation of these dimensions significantly enhances customer satisfaction, engagement, and long-term loyalty. Relying solely on product superiority is no longer an effective competitive strategy in a saturated market characterized by homogeneous offerings and uniform interior designs. Consequently, a café's long-term viability depends heavily on its ability to continuously design and manage the entire customer experience journey, from pre-visit anticipation to post-visit advocacy.

Esenbi Café and Resto is a prominent independent café growing rapidly in Central Bangka Regency and its surroundings, maintaining a high online rating of approximately 4.4 out of 5 based on more than 300 customer reviews. Customer feedback frequently highlights key experiential marketing elements, such as spatial comfort and interior design (Sense), a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere (Feel), live music performances and recreational activities (Act), and the alignment of the café's concept with social identities and lifestyles (Think and Relate). Furthermore, Esenbi Café and Resto actively manages its digital presence, generating strong customer engagement across social media platforms—a crucial channel through which 51.0 percent of its consumers first discover the establishment. Its widespread popularity as a preferred venue for birthday celebrations, romantic dinners, and community gatherings reflects a strong emotional connection with its clientele.

Although research on coffee shop marketing in Indonesia is extensive, the majority of existing studies have focused heavily on major metropolitan cities and national franchise brands, often employing simple regression analyses restricted to single-outcome variables. There remains a significant literature gap regarding independent local cafés in non-metropolitan regions, which exhibit distinct socio-cultural characteristics, purchasing power, and consumption behaviors. Furthermore, this study introduces theoretical novelty by integrating *anticipation* (pre-consumption psychological expectation) as a mediating variable that links experiential marketing with customer engagement and consumer loyalty. Therefore, this study aims to quantitatively analyze the direct and mediating effects of experiential marketing on anticipation, consumer loyalty, and customer engagement using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential marketing theory

Experiential marketing theory emerged as a critique of traditional marketing approaches that focused primarily on functional product features and competitive pricing while overlooking emotional, sensory, and social stimuli. Schmitt (1999) developed a comprehensive strategic framework comprising five Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs): Sense (sensory stimulation through visual, auditory, and tactile elements), Feel (affective stimulation creating positive moods and emotions), Think (cognitive stimulation encouraging creative and divergent thinking), Act (physical experiences and lifestyle transformations), and Relate (social-identity connections linking individuals to a broader community or culture). In the service sector, the strategic orchestration of these five modules generates unique experiential value that differentiates a brand from its competitors and fosters lasting memories.

Anticipation theory

Anticipation is a future-oriented psychological state involving positive expectations, emotional excitement, and imagination that occurs before the actual consumption activity takes place. In contemporary consumer behavior literature, anticipation is distinguished from basic cognitive expectations because it encompasses *savoring*—the act of deriving emotional pleasure from the waiting period itself. In the café industry, marketing stimuli such as social media teasers, promotional announcements, and word-of-mouth recommendations trigger pre-consumption enthusiasm. This psychological state prompts consumers to visualize the spatial comfort, social atmosphere, and product quality of the café prior to their visit. Consequently, the intensity of pre-visit anticipation significantly conditions subsequent post-consumption evaluations and behavioral intentions.

Customer engagement and consumer loyalty theory

Customer engagement refers to the psychological and behavioral involvement of consumers in co-creating value with a brand, extending beyond transactional exchanges. Brodie et al. (2011) conceptualized customer engagement as a multidimensional psychological state comprising cognitive engagement (interest and attention toward the brand), emotional engagement (affective bonding and pride), and behavioral engagement (active participation, advocacy, and social media interactions). Conversely, consumer loyalty is defined as a deeply held commitment to consistently rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts from competitors. In relational marketing, loyalty is reflected not only through retention and repurchase intentions but also through brand preference and positive word-of-mouth advocacy.

Hypothesis development

A well-designed customer experience that engages the senses, emotions, and intellect leaves a lasting positive impression, generating curiosity and excitement for future visits. Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer anticipation.

Interactive experiential marketing creates compelling stimuli that encourage consumers to transition from passive spectators into active participants, fostering deeper involvement in café events and digital brand interactions. Thus, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement.

High-value, emotionally resonant consumption experiences directly enhance customer satisfaction, which serves as the foundation for brand commitment, preference, and repeat visitation. Consequently, the third hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

Consumers who harbor high pre-visit anticipation and enthusiasm are psychologically driven to exhibit greater cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement, such as actively seeking promotional updates or generating social media content during their visit. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Anticipation has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement.

When positive pre-consumption expectations (anticipation) are successfully met or exceeded by the actual service performance, the resulting psychological reinforcement solidifies brand preference and drives long-term customer loyalty. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Anticipation has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an explanatory quantitative approach designed to test causal relationships among latent constructs. The research was conducted at Esenbi Café and Resto, located on Jalan Raya Samhin, Central Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province, Indonesia. The target population comprised all consumers of Esenbi Café and Resto who were at least 17 years old and had visited the establishment at least twice. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select the respondents. In accordance with PLS-SEM guidelines, which recommend a minimum sample size of ten times the total number of measurement indicators (10 x 30 indicators), the sample size for this study was established at 300 respondents.

Primary data were collected using an online structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The

research instrument measured four latent constructs: Experiential Marketing (15 indicators encompassing sense, feel, think, act, and relate), Anticipation (5 indicators encompassing anticipatory emotion, future imagination, and positive expectation), Customer Engagement (5 indicators encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement), and Consumer Loyalty (5 indicators encompassing repurchase intention, recommendation, and preference/commitment).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) executed via SmartPLS software. The analytical procedure consisted of two main stages: the measurement model (outer model) evaluation and the structural model (inner model) evaluation. The outer model was assessed for convergent validity (outer loadings > 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted [AVE] > 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait [HTMT] ratio < 0.90), and construct reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 and Composite Reliability > 0.70). The inner model was evaluated by examining collinearity statistics (VIF < 5.00), coefficients of determination (R-square), effect sizes (F-square), predictive relevance (Q-square > 0), and hypothesis testing via a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples at a 5 percent significance level (t-statistics > 1.96 and p-values < 0.05).

RESULTS

Respondent characteristics

The descriptive analysis of the 300 respondents revealed that the sample was predominantly female (67.0 percent), with male respondents accounting for 33.0 percent. Regarding age distribution, the largest demographic group was respondents aged above 37 years (23.7 percent), followed by those aged 27–32 years (21.3 percent), 33–37 years (19.7 percent), 22–26 years (18.0 percent), and 17–21 years (17.3 percent). In terms of occupational background, entrepreneurs represented the largest share (44.3 percent), followed by private-sector employees (30.7 percent), civil servants (10.3 percent), and students (10.0 percent). Approximately 50.0 percent of the respondents reported a monthly income exceeding IDR 5,000,000. Regarding visit frequency, the majority had visited the café 5–6 times (28.7 percent) or 4–5 times (27.3 percent). Social media served as the primary information source for discovering the café (51.0 percent), followed by word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family (24.7 percent).

Measurement model evaluation

The convergent validity assessment confirmed that all 30 indicators exhibited outer loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.747 to 0.898. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all latent variables surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.50: Anticipation (0.757), Customer Engagement (0.766), Experiential Marketing (0.637), and Consumer Loyalty (0.742). Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, which confirmed that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation with any other construct in the model. Furthermore, all HTMT ratio values remained well below the conservative threshold of 0.90, ranging between 0.602 and 0.697. Construct reliability was also achieved, as both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all four constructs exceeded 0.90, demonstrating exceptional internal consistency.

Structural model evaluation

The collinearity evaluation revealed that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all inner model indicators ranged from 1.782 to 3.291, remaining below the conservative threshold of 3.3. This confirms the absence of multicollinearity and indicates that the model is free from common method bias. The coefficient of determination (R-square) analysis showed that the structural model accounted for 34.3 percent of the variance in Anticipation ($R^2 = 0.343$), 44.7 percent of the variance in Customer Engagement ($R^2 = 0.447$), and 47.2 percent of the variance in Consumer Loyalty ($R^2 = 0.472$). The predictive relevance assessment yielded positive Q-square values for all endogenous variables—Anticipation (0.321), Customer Engagement (0.329), and Consumer Loyalty (0.410)—confirming the model's robust predictive accuracy.

Hypothesis testing

The results of the hypothesis testing conducted via the bootstrapping procedure are presented in Table 1. All five proposed hypotheses exhibited t-statistics exceeding 1.96 and p-values below 0.05, indicating that all direct causal relationships in the structural model are statistically significant and supported.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H1	Experiential Marketing -> Anticipation	0.586	7.557	0.000	Supported
H2	Experiential Marketing -> Customer Engagement	0.385	4.340	0.000	Supported
H3	Experiential Marketing -> Consumer Loyalty	0.505	6.015	0.000	Supported
H4	Anticipation -> Customer Engagement	0.257	2.989	0.003	Supported
H5	Anticipation -> Consumer Loyalty	0.366	4.347	0.000	Supported

DISCUSSION

The empirical findings confirm that experiential marketing exerts a positive and significant effect on consumer anticipation (H1 supported; $\beta = 0.586, p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that creating a compelling sensory, affective, and physical environment leaves a profound psychological impression that generates curiosity and eagerness for future visits. When consumers experience superior spatial comfort, engaging live entertainment, and warm service interactions at Esenbi Café and Resto, they actively imagine and look forward to repeating that experience. This finding aligns with Schmitt's (1999) theoretical framework and corroborates recent studies by Vichiengior et al. (2023), which emphasize that memorable past experiences serve as the primary catalyst for pre-consumption anticipation.

Experiential marketing also demonstrated a positive and significant effect on customer engagement (H2 supported; $\beta = 0.385, p < 0.001$). A holistic customer experience orchestrated through live music events (Act) and community-oriented gathering spaces (Relate) encourages consumers to become active co-creators of value rather than passive patrons. Because the majority of respondents (51.0 percent) discovered the café via social media, positive physical experiences at the venue seamlessly translate into digital engagement, such as sharing user-generated content and interacting with the brand online. This reinforces the findings of Sulastri and Fadillah (2023) and Kurnia (2025), who highlighted the critical role of interactive experiential strategies in fostering multidimensional customer engagement in the café industry.

Furthermore, experiential marketing has a positive and significant direct effect on consumer loyalty (H3 supported; $\beta = 0.505, p < 0.001$). High standards of interior aesthetics, creative beverage presentation, and service excellence establish strong perceived value and emotional attachment. This positive evaluation acts as a psychological switching barrier against competitors, directly driving repeat visitation, long-term patronage commitment, and word-of-mouth advocacy. This outcome is consistent with empirical findings by Kushenda and Hariasi (2024) and Hasbiah and Hasdiansa (2023), confirming that experiential marketing is a vital determinant of customer retention in the competitive food and beverage sector.

The structural model also confirms that anticipation positively and significantly influences both customer engagement (H4 supported; $\beta = 0.257, p = 0.003$) and consumer loyalty (H5 supported; $\beta = 0.366, p < 0.001$). Pre-consumption enthusiasm and positive expectations motivate consumers to actively seek promotional updates, participate in café events, and maintain strong brand preference. Crucially, the path

analysis demonstrates that anticipation functions as a robust mediating variable that bridges experiential marketing with both post-consumption engagement and loyalty. This insight provides significant theoretical novelty: building customer loyalty in non-metropolitan café ecosystems is not merely an instantaneous transactional outcome, but rather a continuous cyclical process where superior past experiences cultivate pre-visit anticipation, which subsequently locks in customer commitment and advocacy over the long term.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that experiential marketing plays a decisive strategic role in building consumer anticipation, customer engagement, and brand loyalty at Esenbi Café and Resto in Pangkal Pinang City. The five strategic experiential modules (Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate) significantly enhance customer retention and active involvement both directly and indirectly through the mediating mechanism of pre-consumption anticipation. Designing a holistic, emotionally resonant customer experience effectively fosters sustained enthusiasm and long-term commitment among local non-metropolitan consumers.

Theoretically, this study contributes to services marketing literature by validating the mediating role of anticipation within an integrated experiential model. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this framework by incorporating additional mediating constructs such as brand love or customer satisfaction, and by exploring digital touchpoints through the lens of Service-Dominant Logic. From a managerial perspective, café executives are advised to leverage anticipation-driven marketing strategies by publishing interactive social media teasers (e.g., menu countdowns and event rehearsal previews), strengthening community bonding through regular live music performances, and maintaining superior service hospitality. By continuously innovating the customer experience, independent local cafés can secure sustainable customer loyalty without engaging in destructive price competition.

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