

From Dining Experience to Customer Loyalty: The Role of Brand Attraction in Retail Environments

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As retailers increasingly integrate dining services into their business models, in-store dining has become an important experiential element that may influence customer perceptions and loyalty. This study examines the relationship between dining experience and brand attraction, as well as the influence of brand attraction on customer loyalty in IKEA's retail environment. Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework and Experiential Marketing Theory, a quantitative survey was conducted among 204 IKEA customers in Malaysia. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that dining experience was positively associated with brand attraction ($r = 0.663$, $p < 0.001$). Brand attraction also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with customer loyalty ($r = 0.789$, $p < 0.001$) and emerged as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty ($b = 0.691$, $p < 0.001$). The regression model explained 63.5% of the variance in customer loyalty ($R^2 = 0.635$). Dining experience also demonstrated a smaller but statistically significant contribution to customer loyalty. The findings suggest that in-store dining increases brand attraction and customer loyalty, providing valuable insights for improving customer engagement and retention.

Keywords: Brand Attraction; Customer Loyalty; Dining Experience; Experiential Marketing; Retailing Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Consumer experience has become an increasingly important factor in shaping customer perceptions, brand relationships, and long-term loyalty in today's competitive retail environment. Rather than focusing solely on products and prices, consumers now seek experiences that are engaging, meaningful, and memorable. As a result, organizations are creating value not only through tangible offerings but also through emotional, sensory, and symbolic experiences that influence how customers perceive and interact with a brand. Previous studies have shown that multisensory cues, such as sight, sound, and aroma, can enhance customer engagement and satisfaction, ultimately contributing to stronger business performance (Lindblom, 2023; Zha et al., 2025). Consequently, retailers are increasingly competing on the basis of the overall customer experience rather than on product attributes alone.

Among global retailers, IKEA is widely recognized for its ability to create a distinctive shopping experience. Founded in 1943 in Älmhult, Sweden, IKEA has grown into one of the world's largest home furnishing retailers, with more than 490 stores operating across over 60 countries (IKEA, 2025). Guided by its vision of creating a better everyday life for the many people, IKEA combines affordability, functionality, and Scandinavian-inspired design to deliver value to customers (IKEA, 2024). Beyond its furniture offerings, IKEA has also developed a unique in-store dining concept that has become an integral part of the overall customer experience. The restaurant allows customers to enjoy Swedish-inspired meals while taking a break from shopping, creating an environment that reflects the brand's emphasis on comfort, accessibility, and community. Prior studies suggest that integrating dining and retail experiences can positively influence customer perceptions and strengthen emotional engagement with a brand (Isaksson & Suljanovic, 2006; Jeon & Yoo, 2021).

This study draws upon the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework and Experiential Marketing Theory to explain how dining experiences may influence customer attitudes and behaviors. According to the SOR framework, environmental stimuli can shape individuals' internal evaluations, which subsequently influence behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within the context of this study, the dining experience represents the stimulus, brand attraction reflects customers' internal evaluations of the brand, and customer loyalty represents the behavioral response. In a similar vein, Experiential Marketing Theory emphasizes that sensory and emotional interactions play an important role in shaping customer perceptions and strengthening brand relationships (Schmitt, 1999). Together, these perspectives provide a useful foundation for understanding how experiences within IKEA's restaurant environment may contribute to favorable brand outcomes.

Although dining facilities have become increasingly common in large retail environments, empirical research examining their role in shaping brand-related outcomes remains relatively limited. Existing studies have largely focused on dining experiences in restaurants and hospitality settings, where food and service constitute the primary offering. Research involving IKEA has explored various topics, including customer behavior (Sin et al., 2021), brand attitude, brand experience, brand love, and word-of-mouth (Elanchelian, 2022), determinants of international retail success (Singh et al., 2021), corporate social responsibility (Al Shuwaler et al., 2020), and environmental performance (Alrubah et al., 2020). However, little attention has been given to understanding how dining experiences within a retail environment influence customers' perceptions of the brand and their loyalty intentions. More specifically, the role of brand attraction within this relationship remains insufficiently explored in retail-based dining contexts.

Addressing this gap is important because retailers are increasingly investing in complementary services to differentiate themselves and strengthen customer engagement. Understanding how dining experiences contribute to brand attraction and customer loyalty can provide valuable insights into the broader role of experiential retailing in shaping customer behavior. Such insights are particularly relevant for retailers like IKEA, where dining services have evolved beyond a supporting function and become an important component of the overall customer experience.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between dining experience and brand attraction, as well as the influence of brand attraction on customer loyalty among IKEA customers in Malaysia. This study contributes to the literature by examining dining experience within a non-food-dominant retail setting, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. By applying the SOR framework and Experiential Marketing Theory, this study extends current understanding of how experiential elements influence brand-related outcomes in integrated retail environments. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on experiential consumption while offering practical guidance for retailers seeking to strengthen customer engagement, enhance brand attraction, and foster long-term customer loyalty through complementary dining services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Framework

The SOR framework, originally developed by [Mehrabian and Russell \(1974\)](#), is widely used to explain how environmental factors influence consumer behavior. According to this framework, external environmental stimuli affect individuals' internal cognitive and emotional evaluations, which subsequently shape behavioral responses. The model has been extensively applied in retail, hospitality, and tourism research to explain how customers react to physical environments, service encounters, and experiential elements that influence their perceptions and actions.

In the context of the present study, dining experience represents the stimulus because it encompasses customers' evaluations of food quality, ambience, cleanliness, and service quality within IKEA's restaurant environment. Brand attraction serves as the organism, reflecting customers' internal evaluations and emotional responses toward the brand. Customer loyalty represents the response, which is manifested through intentions to revisit, recommend, and maintain a favorable relationship with the brand ([Croitoru et al., 2024](#)). The SOR framework therefore provides a suitable theoretical foundation for explaining how dining experiences may shape brand-related outcomes through customers' psychological evaluations.

Experiential Marketing Theory

Experiential Marketing Theory emphasizes that consumers seek memorable experiences rather than merely functional benefits when interacting with brands. [Schmitt \(1999\)](#) proposed that organizations can create value through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences that strengthen customer engagement and brand relationships. Rather than focusing solely on product attributes, experiential marketing highlights how customers feel, think, and respond throughout their interactions with a brand.

In retail and hospitality settings, experiential elements such as ambience, service encounters, food quality, and environmental design contribute significantly to customers' overall evaluations and future behavioral intentions. Previous studies have shown that positive customer experiences can enhance satisfaction, strengthen brand perceptions,

and increase loyalty intentions (Irwanto & Marsono, 2023). Within IKEA's retail environment, the in-store restaurant represents an important experiential touchpoint that complements the shopping journey and contributes to customers' overall perception of the brand.

Dining Experience

Dining experience refers to customers' overall evaluation of their interactions with a restaurant environment, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects of service delivery. Rather than being determined solely by the quality of food, dining experiences are shaped by multiple dimensions that collectively influence customers' emotional and cognitive responses. Previous studies have consistently shown that dining experiences play a significant role in shaping customer satisfaction, brand image, revisit intentions, and loyalty outcomes (Jin et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2019).

In this study, dining experience is conceptualized through four key dimensions: food quality, ambience, cleanliness, and service quality.

Food quality is often regarded as one of the most important determinants of dining satisfaction. It reflects customers' evaluations of taste, freshness, consistency, presentation, and overall quality of menu offerings. High-quality food contributes to favorable customer experiences and enhances perceptions of value (Tan et al., 2022).

Ambience refers to the physical and sensory characteristics of a dining environment, including layout, lighting, seating comfort, temperature, and overall atmosphere. A well-designed dining environment can improve customer comfort and encourage positive emotional responses during service encounters (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Cleanliness is another critical element influencing customers' perceptions of service quality and safety. Herniwanti and Jayanti (2022) define cleanliness as maintaining hygienic dining facilities, equipment, food preparation areas, and employee hygiene practices. High standards of cleanliness help create trust and confidence among customers, particularly in food service environments.

Service quality reflects customers' evaluations of how effectively services are delivered and whether their expectations are fulfilled. It includes employee responsiveness, reliability, courtesy, and the overall effectiveness of service processes. Positive service encounters contribute significantly to customers' overall dining experiences and evaluations of the organization.

Within IKEA's restaurant environment, these dimensions collectively shape customers' perceptions of the dining experience. As customers increasingly value experiential consumption, positive dining experiences may contribute not only to satisfaction with the restaurant itself but also to favorable perceptions of the IKEA brand as a whole.

Brand Attraction

Brand attraction refers to the extent to which a brand generates positive interest, appeal, and emotional attachment among consumers. It reflects customers' perceptions that a brand is desirable, distinctive, and capable of meeting their expectations. According to So et al. (2016), brand attractiveness plays an important role in strengthening customers' identification with a brand and influencing subsequent behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Tengho (2024) suggests that brand attraction emerges when consumers perceive a brand as appealing and differentiated from competing alternatives.

In experiential consumption settings, customers often form brand evaluations based on their interactions with various touchpoints rather than through products alone. Positive experiences can strengthen emotional connections with a brand and enhance its attractiveness in the minds of consumers. Previous studies have shown that favorable customer experiences contribute to stronger brand image, emotional attachment, and positive brand evaluations (Hussain, 2018; Jeon & Yoo, 2021).

For IKEA, the restaurant experience extends beyond its functional purpose of providing food and refreshments. The dining environment reinforces the brand's identity, values, and overall customer experience. Positive dining experiences may therefore strengthen customers' perceptions of IKEA as a distinctive and appealing brand.

Hypotheses Development

Dining Experience and Brand Attraction

According to the SOR framework, environmental stimuli influence consumers' internal evaluations and emotional responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In retail and hospitality settings, dining experiences constitute important environmental stimuli that shape customers' perceptions of a brand. Previous studies have demonstrated that experiential elements such as food quality, ambience, and service quality positively influence brand image, brand evaluations, and emotional attachment (Hussain, 2018; Jeon & Yoo, 2021; Jin et al., 2012).

When customers experience enjoyable dining encounters, they are more likely to develop favorable perceptions of the brand associated with those experiences. Positive dining experiences can enhance emotional engagement and increase the overall attractiveness of a brand by creating memorable interactions that extend beyond functional consumption. Within IKEA's retail environment, the restaurant serves as an experiential platform that contributes to customers' overall perception of the brand. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H1: Dining experience has a positive relationship with brand attraction.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to a customer's commitment to continue engaging with, purchasing from, and recommending a particular brand over time. Loyal customers are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with organizations, demonstrate repeat patronage, and engage in positive word-of-mouth behavior (Singh et al., 2023). As such, customer loyalty is widely regarded as a critical indicator of long-term business success.

Previous research has shown that loyalty is influenced not only by product quality and satisfaction but also by customers' emotional connections and perceptions of a brand. Strong brand evaluations often encourage customers to maintain favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a company (Kim et al., 2021).

Brand Attraction and Customer Loyalty

Within the SOR framework, customers' internal evaluations serve as an important mechanism through which environmental stimuli influence behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Brand attraction reflects these internal evaluations by capturing customers' emotional and cognitive perceptions of a brand. When customers perceive a brand as attractive, distinctive, and personally relevant, they are more likely to develop stronger loyalty intentions.

Prior studies have reported that favorable brand perceptions, positive brand experiences, and strong emotional connections contribute significantly to customer

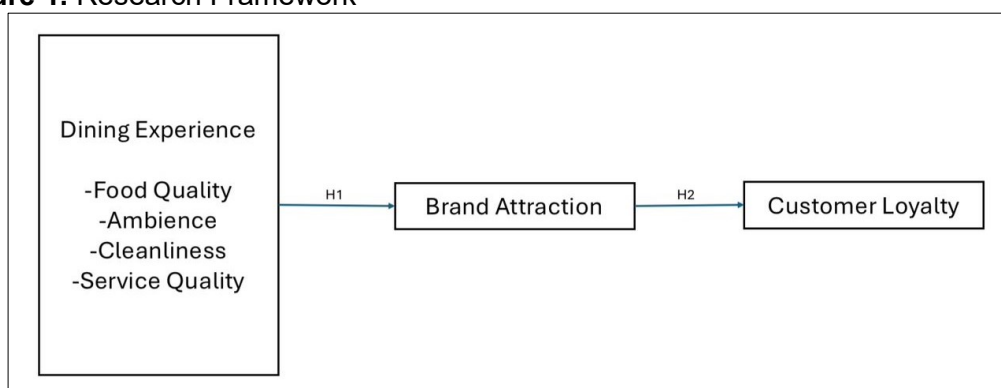
loyalty (Hussein, 2023; Jin et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2021). Customers who perceive a brand positively are generally more willing to revisit, recommend, and maintain long-term relationships with that brand. In the context of IKEA, stronger brand attraction may encourage customers to continue engaging with the company and support long-term loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand attraction has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon the SOR framework and Experiential Marketing Theory, this study proposes that dining experience functions as the environmental stimulus, brand attraction represents customers' internal evaluations, and customer loyalty reflects the resulting behavioral response. The proposed framework in Figure 1 suggests that favorable dining experiences contribute to stronger brand attraction, which is subsequently associated with higher levels of customer loyalty.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling and Data Collection

This study employed a purposive sampling approach by targeting individuals who had dined at IKEA's in-store restaurant within the previous six months and were at least 18 years old. The six-month criterion was applied to ensure that respondents could accurately recall and evaluate their dining experiences. This approach was considered appropriate because the study sought insights from individuals with direct and relatively recent experience of IKEA's restaurant services, enabling them to provide informed assessments of their dining experience, perceptions of the brand, and loyalty intentions.

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The survey link was distributed through various digital platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook, to increase accessibility and reach a diverse group of IKEA customers across Malaysia. Online distribution was selected because it offered an efficient, practical, and cost-effective means of collecting data within a limited period while allowing participation from respondents in different geographical locations.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. All responses were collected anonymously, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Ethical research principles were strictly observed, and all information obtained was used solely for academic purposes. A total of 204 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis. This sample size was considered adequate for conducting the statistical

procedures employed in this study and for providing meaningful insights into customer perceptions of IKEA's restaurant services in Malaysia.

Measurement

The questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first section collected demographic information, including gender, race, and educational level. The subsequent sections measured the three principal constructs of the study: dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty. The final section examined respondents' actual dining behavior and purchase influence.

Dining experience was measured through attributes commonly identified in restaurant and hospitality research, including food quality, service quality, ambience, and cleanliness. These dimensions represent key aspects of customers' evaluations of restaurant experiences and have been widely associated with favorable customer outcomes. Brand attraction measured the extent to which customers perceived the IKEA brand as appealing, distinctive, and emotionally engaging as a result of their dining experiences. Customer loyalty assessed respondents' intentions to revisit, recommend IKEA to others, and maintain positive attitudes toward the brand. The final section captured behavioral indicators such as dining frequency, spending patterns, and the extent to which dining experiences encouraged additional purchases or future visits. These behavioral measures were included to provide supplementary insights into how dining experiences may be reflected in actual customer actions.

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). The measurement items were adapted from established literature and contextualized to the IKEA restaurant environment to ensure construct validity and contextual relevance (Richardson et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2021; So et al., 2016; Srivastava & Kaul, 2016; Teoh et al., 2025). The adaptation process involved modifying wording and expressions to better reflect IKEA's dining environment while preserving the conceptual meaning of the original scales.

Dining experience items were primarily adapted from restaurant and hospitality studies that conceptualized dining experiences through food quality, service quality, ambience, and cleanliness. Food quality was measured using items adapted from Richardson et al. (2019), such as perceptions of the quality of food served at IKEA. In addition, selected contextual items adapted from Teoh et al. (2025) were incorporated to capture convenience-related aspects of the dining experience within the broader shopping journey. These items were modified to reflect the integration of dining and retail activities, such as the convenience of dining during a shopping visit.

Brand attraction was measured using items adapted from the brand attractiveness literature. For example, the original statement "[Brand] stands out from its competitors" (So et al., 2016) was adapted to reflect the extent to which IKEA's dining experience enhances the distinctiveness of the IKEA brand. Customer loyalty was measured using behavioral intention indicators, including revisit intention, recommendation intention, and future purchase consideration. Several items were adapted from Singh et al. (2021) and Srivastava & Kaul (2016) to reflect customers' future engagement with IKEA and their likelihood of revisiting the retailer following their dining experiences.

Pilot Test, Reliability, and Validity

A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted before the main data collection to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and suitability of the questionnaire. Pilot participants were selected using the same purposive sampling criteria applied in the main study. Feedback

from the pilot test was used to refine wording, improve item clarity, and enhance the overall flow of the questionnaire.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which is widely recognized as an indicator of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Measurement items were retained only when they met the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. The pilot results indicated satisfactory reliability for all constructs, supporting the suitability of the instrument for the main survey.

To enhance measurement quality, face validity and content validity assessments were also conducted. These procedures ensured that the questionnaire items were clear, understandable, and adequately represented the constructs of dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and dining-related profiles through frequency and percentage distributions. This analysis provided an overview of the sample and facilitated a better understanding of the respondents who participated in the study.

Inferential statistical analyses were subsequently conducted to examine the relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of the associations among the study variables and to evaluate the proposed relationship between dining experience and brand attraction. Multiple regression analysis was then performed to examine the relative contributions of dining experience and brand attraction in predicting customer loyalty and to evaluate the proposed relationship between brand attraction and customer loyalty.

Prior to conducting regression analysis, preliminary diagnostic tests were performed to assess key assumptions, including normality and multicollinearity. The results confirmed that the data satisfied the necessary assumptions and were suitable for regression analysis.

Although the proposed framework is conceptually grounded in the SOR perspective, the present study focused on examining the direct relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty. Consequently, the mediating role of brand attraction was not formally tested, and the findings should be interpreted as evidence of direct associations rather than a complete examination of the SOR process.

In addition to the hypothesis testing procedures, responses related to actual dining behavior and purchase influence were analyzed descriptively to provide supplementary insights into customers' dining patterns and behavioral tendencies. Collectively, these analyses offer a broader understanding of how dining experiences contribute to customers' perceptions of the IKEA brand and their loyalty intentions.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demography (N=204)

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	56.9
	Female	88	43.1
Age	18-21 years old	70	34.3

	22-25 years old	86	42.2
	25 years old and above	48	23.5
Race	Chinese	111	54.4
	Indian	43	21.1
	Malay	44	21.6
	Others	6	2.9
Educational Level	Diploma	29	14.2
	Bachelor's Degree	125	61.3
	Master's Degree	37	18.1
	PhD Degree	13	6.4
Frequency of visit to IKEA	Weekly	25	12.3
	Monthly	81	39.7
	A few times a year	56	27.5
	Rarely	42	20.6

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 204 respondents. Male respondents accounted for 56.9% of the sample, while female respondents represented 43.1%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 22 and 25 years old (42.2%), followed by those aged 18–21 years (34.3%), indicating that the sample was predominantly composed of young adults. Respondents aged 25 years and above constituted 23.5% of the sample.

With respect to race, Chinese respondents formed the largest group (54.4%), followed by Malay (21.6%) and Indian (21.1%) respondents, while participants from other racial groups accounted for 2.9%. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (61.3%), followed by a master's degree (18.1%), a diploma (14.2%), and a PhD degree (6.4%). This distribution suggests that the sample was generally well educated.

In terms of shopping frequency, monthly visits to IKEA were the most common (39.7%), followed by visits a few times a year (27.5%), rare visits (20.6%), and weekly visits (12.3%). Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the respondents were predominantly young, educated consumers who were reasonably familiar with IKEA and its retail environment.

Table 2. Respondent Actual Behavior

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bought IKEA food products	Yes	193	94.6
	No	11	5.4
Average spending per visit	Less than RM20	20	9.8
	RM20-39	71	34.8
	RM40-59	62	30.4
	RM60 or more	51	25.0
More likely to shop after dining	Yes	204	100.0
	No	0	0
Extra time stayed	Less than 30 minutes	18	8.8
	30-60 minutes	68	33.3
	1-2 hours	73	35.8
	More than 2 hours	45	22.1
Dining influences revisit decision	Yes	200	98.0
	No	4	2.0

Table 2 summarizes respondents' dining and shopping behaviors at IKEA. The findings show that a substantial majority of respondents (94.6%) had previously purchased food products from IKEA, while only 5.4% reported otherwise. Regarding spending patterns, the largest proportion of respondents spent between RM20 and RM39 per visit (34.8%), followed by RM40–RM59 (30.4%). One-quarter of the respondents reported spending RM60 or more (25.0%), whereas only 9.8% spent less than RM20.

Notably, all respondents indicated that dining at IKEA increased their likelihood of shopping within the store. Although this finding suggests a strong perceived connection between dining and shopping activities, it should be interpreted with caution because it is based on self-reported behavioral perceptions. Regarding the duration of their stay, most respondents remained in IKEA for between one and two hours after dining (35.8%), followed by 30–60 minutes (33.3%), more than two hours (22.1%), and less than 30 minutes (8.8%).

Furthermore, 98.0% of respondents reported that their dining experience positively influenced their intention to revisit IKEA, while only 2.0% reported otherwise. Collectively, these findings suggest that dining activities are closely integrated with customers' overall retail experiences and may contribute to longer stays and stronger revisit intentions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

Variables		1	2	3
1	Dining Experience	0.857		
2	Brand Attraction	0.663***	0.796	
3	Customer Loyalty	0.606***	0.789***	0.772
Number of Items		10	8	5
Mean		4.479	4.519	4.476
Standard Deviation		0.403	0.373	0.460

Note: N = 204; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations for the study variables. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.772 to 0.857, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). These results indicate that the measurement scales were reliable for assessing dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty.

The mean scores for dining experience (M = 4.479), brand attraction (M = 4.519), and customer loyalty (M = 4.476) were all relatively high, suggesting that respondents generally held favorable perceptions of IKEA's restaurant experience, the IKEA brand, and their loyalty intentions.

The results revealed a significant positive association between dining experience and brand attraction ($r = 0.663$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that respondents who reported more favorable dining experiences also tended to perceive the IKEA brand as more attractive. Therefore, the findings provide empirical support for H1, which proposed a positive relationship between dining experience and brand attraction.

Significant positive relationships were also observed between dining experience and customer loyalty ($r = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$) and between brand attraction and customer loyalty ($r = 0.789$, $p < 0.001$). Among these relationships, the association between brand attraction and customer loyalty was the strongest, suggesting that respondents who

perceived IKEA as a more attractive brand were more likely to report stronger loyalty intentions.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Customer Loyalty

Variables		Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Beta(β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)		-0.128	0.252		-0.508	0.612
1	Dining Experience	0.169	0.065	0.148*	2.598	0.010
2	Brand Attraction	0.852	0.070	0.691***	12.128	<0.001

Note: N = 204; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; R = 0.797, R² = 0.635, Adjusted R² = 0.631, F(2,201) = 174.575, p < 0.001

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which dining experience and brand attraction predict customer loyalty toward IKEA. In addition to evaluating the proposed relationship between brand attraction and customer loyalty, the analysis was performed to assess the relative contribution of each predictor to customer loyalty within the overall model.

The overall regression model in Table 4 was statistically significant, F(2, 201) = 174.575, p < 0.001, indicating that dining experience and brand attraction jointly contribute to explaining variations in customer loyalty. The model accounted for 63.5% of the variance in customer loyalty (R² = 0.635), while the adjusted R² value of 0.631 suggests that the model retained substantial explanatory power after accounting for the number of predictors included.

Among the predictors, brand attraction emerged as the strongest contributor to customer loyalty (β = 0.691, t = 12.128, p < 0.001). This result indicates that stronger perceptions of brand attraction are associated with higher levels of customer loyalty. Therefore, H2, which proposed that brand attraction positively affects customer loyalty, is supported. Dining experience also demonstrated a positive and statistically significant contribution to customer loyalty (β = 0.148, t = 2.598, p = 0.010), although its relative contribution was considerably smaller than that of brand attraction.

The unstandardized coefficients further indicate that a one-unit increase in brand attraction is associated with a 0.852-unit increase in customer loyalty, whereas a one-unit increase in dining experience is associated with a 0.169-unit increase in customer loyalty. Overall, the findings suggest that both dining experience and brand attraction play significant roles in shaping customer loyalty, with brand attraction representing the more influential predictor within the proposed model.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty within the context of IKEA's in-store restaurant. Drawing upon the SOR framework and Experiential Marketing Theory, the findings provide evidence that dining experiences contribute positively to brand attraction and customer loyalty, while brand attraction emerges as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty. These findings highlight the strategic role of dining services as part of a broader retail experience that extends beyond the functional purpose of food consumption.

Dining Experience and Brand Attraction

The findings indicate that dining experience is positively associated with brand attraction, supporting H1. Respondents who reported more favorable evaluations of food quality, ambience, cleanliness, and service quality also tended to perceive the IKEA brand as more attractive. This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role

of experiential quality in shaping customers' perceptions of a brand (Hussein, 2018; Jin et al., 2012; Sithole et al., 2025).

From the perspective of Experiential Marketing Theory, customers evaluate brands not only through products and services but also through the experiences that accompany them. Sensory and emotional elements such as restaurant ambience, food presentation, comfort, and service interactions can create memorable experiences that strengthen positive brand evaluations. The present findings suggest that IKEA's restaurant environment functions as an important experiential touchpoint that contributes to how customers perceive the overall brand.

The findings also align with the SOR framework. Dining experience, as the environmental stimulus, appears to influence customers' internal evaluations of the IKEA brand, represented by brand attraction. When customers enjoy positive dining experiences, they are more likely to develop favorable impressions of IKEA, reinforcing its image as a value-oriented, customer-focused, and experience-driven retailer. Similar observations have been reported in previous studies showing that experiential elements can enhance brand perceptions and strengthen emotional engagement with a brand (Hussain, 2018; Jin et al., 2012; Sithole et al., 2025).

These findings are particularly relevant in the context of IKEA because its restaurant is integrated into the overall retail journey rather than operating as a standalone foodservice outlet. Consequently, customers may perceive their dining experiences as part of their broader interaction with the IKEA brand, allowing restaurant experiences to contribute meaningfully to overall brand attraction.

Brand Attraction and Customer Loyalty

The findings further demonstrate that brand attraction is a significant predictor of customer loyalty, providing support for H2. Among the variables included in the regression model, brand attraction emerged as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty. This suggests that customers who perceive IKEA as an attractive, distinctive, and appealing brand are more likely to revisit, recommend the retailer to others, and maintain favorable attitudes toward the brand.

This finding is consistent with Hussein (2023), who reported that positive brand-related perceptions are closely associated with long-term loyalty outcomes. Similarly, Kim et al. (2021) found that favorable evaluations of a brand's offerings can strengthen customers' emotional commitment and encourage repeat patronage. Studies examining organizational practices and customer-focused service interactions have also shown that positive customer experiences contribute to stronger brand attachment and continued engagement with a brand (Ali, 2020).

From the perspective of the SOR framework, brand attraction represents customers' internal evaluations that influence subsequent behavioral responses. The strong relationship observed between brand attraction and customer loyalty suggests that customers' perceptions of the IKEA brand play an important role in shaping their future behavioral intentions. While dining experiences contribute to these perceptions, customers' overall evaluations of the brand ultimately appear to be more influential in determining loyalty intentions.

The findings further suggest that customer loyalty is not driven solely by functional benefits such as affordability or convenience. Instead, customers appear to develop loyalty when they perceive the brand as meaningful, distinctive, and capable of delivering consistently positive experiences across multiple touchpoints. For IKEA, this highlights

the importance of maintaining a coherent brand experience that integrates both retail and dining services.

Additional Findings: Dining Experience and Customer Loyalty

Although the proposed framework focused primarily on the relationships between dining experience and brand attraction and between brand attraction and customer loyalty, the supplementary regression analysis also indicated that dining experience contributed positively and significantly to customer loyalty. While this contribution was smaller than that of brand attraction, the finding indicates that dining experiences remain an important factor influencing customers' loyalty intentions.

This result is consistent with previous studies suggesting that positive dining experiences can strengthen customers' willingness to revisit, recommend, and maintain favorable relationships with a brand (Hussein, 2018; Jin et al., 2012). Food quality, service quality, ambience, and cleanliness collectively contribute to customers' overall evaluations of their experiences and can influence their future behavioral intentions.

From an experiential marketing perspective, positive experiences create value beyond immediate consumption. Customers who enjoy the dining environment may associate these favorable experiences with the broader IKEA brand, thereby strengthening their overall engagement with the company. Similar findings have been reported by Han et al. (2022) and Sithole et al. (2025), who highlighted the importance of customer-focused service experiences in fostering favorable customer outcomes.

Taken together, these findings suggest that IKEA's restaurant serves not merely as a supporting facility but as an integral component of the customer journey. By delivering consistent and enjoyable dining experiences, IKEA can strengthen customer engagement and contribute to the development of long-term loyalty.

Managerial Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for retail organizations seeking to strengthen customer engagement through experiential strategies.

First, IKEA should continue investing in sensory and experiential elements within its restaurant environment. Factors such as ambience, seating comfort, cleanliness, food presentation, and service quality contribute to positive customer evaluations and strengthen brand attraction. Continuous improvements in these areas can help reinforce favorable perceptions of the IKEA brand and enhance customer engagement (Kim et al., 2021; Sithole et al., 2025).

Second, the findings indicate that IKEA's restaurant should be viewed as a strategic brand asset rather than merely a supplementary service. Experiential initiatives such as thematic dining concepts, seasonal menu offerings, limited-time promotions, and integrated retail-dining experiences may further strengthen customers' perceptions of the brand and increase engagement levels. Consistent with Han et al. (2022) and Jeon & Yoo (2021), dining experiences can serve as an important platform for reinforcing brand identity and creating memorable customer interactions.

Third, the behavioral findings suggest that dining activities are closely connected with shopping behavior. Since all respondents reported that dining increased their likelihood of shopping within IKEA, the company may benefit from designing more integrated dining and retail experiences. Promotional bundles, strategic store layouts, and targeted cross-selling initiatives could encourage customers to spend more time within the store and increase overall customer value.

Finally, given that the majority of respondents were young and highly educated consumers, IKEA may consider developing targeted initiatives that resonate with lifestyle-oriented customer segments. Digital engagement campaigns, loyalty programs, seasonal dining experiences, and social-media-driven promotions may strengthen brand attraction and encourage repeat visits. By creating experiences that align with customers' preferences and lifestyles, IKEA can further strengthen customer loyalty and encourage positive word-of-mouth behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty within the context of IKEA's in-store restaurant. Drawing upon the SOR framework and Experiential Marketing Theory, the study investigated how customers' dining experiences contribute to brand attraction and loyalty intentions.

The findings demonstrate that dining experience is positively associated with brand attraction, indicating that favorable evaluations of food quality, ambience, cleanliness, and service quality contribute to more positive perceptions of the IKEA brand. The results also reveal that brand attraction is a significant predictor of customer loyalty and represents the strongest factor influencing customers' intentions to revisit, recommend, and maintain positive attitudes toward IKEA. Additional regression analysis further indicated that dining experience contributes positively to customer loyalty, although its influence was less substantial than that of brand attraction.

These findings highlight the strategic value of dining services within a retail environment. Rather than functioning solely as a supporting facility, IKEA's restaurant appears to contribute meaningfully to customers' overall brand evaluations and loyalty intentions. By creating enjoyable and memorable dining experiences, retailers can strengthen customer engagement and reinforce positive brand perceptions across multiple customer touchpoints.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on experiential consumption by demonstrating the relevance of the SOR framework in explaining how experiential elements within a non-food-dominant retail setting influence brand-related outcomes. The findings suggest that dining experiences can extend beyond immediate service evaluations and contribute to broader perceptions of brand attractiveness and customer loyalty.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that retailers should view in-store dining as a strategic component of the overall customer experience. Investments in food quality, service quality, ambience, and cleanliness may not only improve dining satisfaction but also strengthen brand attraction and foster long-term customer loyalty.

LIMITATION

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on self-reported data collected through a structured questionnaire. Although this approach is widely used in consumer behavior research, respondents' answers may be influenced by response bias, social desirability bias, or imperfect recall of previous dining experiences. Consequently, reported perceptions and behavioral intentions may not fully reflect actual customer behavior within the retail environment.

Second, the sample was limited to IKEA customers in Malaysia. Consumer expectations, dining preferences, and retail experiences may vary across countries and cultural contexts. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings beyond the Malaysian setting. Future studies may employ cross-country or cross-cultural research designs to examine whether similar relationships are observed in different markets.

Third, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design, with data collected at a single point in time. While the findings identify significant relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty, the design does not permit strong conclusions regarding causality. Longitudinal studies may provide a deeper understanding of how these relationships develop and evolve over time.

Fourth, although dining experience was conceptualized through key dimensions such as food quality, service quality, ambience, and cleanliness, other potentially relevant factors were not examined. Variables such as menu variety, perceived value, waiting time, promotional activities, and pricing perceptions may also influence customers' evaluations and behavioral outcomes. Future research may incorporate these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of dining experiences within retail environments.

Finally, although the study was theoretically grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, the analysis focused primarily on direct relationships among dining experience, brand attraction, and customer loyalty. The mediating role of brand attraction was not formally examined. Future studies may employ mediation or moderation analyses to investigate the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions through which dining experiences influence customer loyalty.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest—financial or otherwise—related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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