



Beyond Taste: How Emotional Bonds and Behavioral Habits Drive Repurchase Intention In Heritage Food Brand

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| ABSTRACT

Understanding repeat purchase drivers in established culinary brands is critical as classical sensory marketing assumptions may not apply universally across market maturity stages. In mature markets where brands have operated for decades, the relative importance of functional, emotional, and habitual mechanisms remains inadequately explored, creating a significant knowledge gap in consumer behavior literature. This study examines and compares the relative influence of taste, brand attachment, and consumer inertia on repurchase intention in heritage food brands, investigating whether sensory attributes maintain predictive dominance or whether emotional and habitual mechanisms eclipse functional drivers. Data were collected from 150 repeat customers of Sekarmaju heritage food stall in Cirebon, Indonesia, through structured questionnaires. The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0, using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test four hypotheses examining direct effects individually and simultaneously. Results challenge classical sensory marketing assumptions. Taste shows no significant effect ($\beta = 0.008$, $p = 0.896$), while brand attachment emerges as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.383$), followed by consumer inertia ($\beta = 0.431$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.210$). The model explains 84.5% of variance ($R^2 = 0.845$). In heritage brands, taste shifts from motivator to hygiene factor, with emotional bonding and behavioral automaticity constituting more powerful retention mechanisms. Findings identify boundary conditions in sensory marketing theory, suggesting established businesses should prioritize relationship building over product improvements. This extends consumer behavior theory by demonstrating lifecycle effects fundamentally alter purchase driver importance.

| KEYWORDS

Repurchase Intention, Brand Attachment, Consumer Inertia, Heritage Brands.

I. INTRODUCTION

Warung Sekarmaju, which previously experienced stable sales, has seen a decline over the past three months, indicating a weakening in repeat purchases. This situation is a cause for concern, given that the culinary business is highly dependent on repeat purchases to sustain its revenue. This decline may reflect retention issues, such as declines in taste evaluations, weakening brand loyalty, or disruptions in consumer buying habits. Amid increasingly fierce culinary competition, this situation signals the potential for customers to switch to alternatives, underscoring the urgency of research into the factors influencing Warung Sekarmaju consumers repurchase intentions. In the consumer behavior literature, repurchase intention is understood as an individual's intention to repurchase from the same provider, based on prior purchase experiences and the alignment of product performance with expectations [1]. Repurchase intention is a favorable behavioral intention that reflects loyalty

and long-term customer value, making it a relevant indicator of success in culinary businesses. Thus, repurchase intention not only demonstrates the intention to repurchase but also indicates the quality of a sustainable consumer-brand relationship.[2] First, taste, as the core benefit of food products, plays a role through sensory mechanisms.

Taste is understood as a multisensory experience that encompasses appearance, aroma, flavor, texture, temperature, and auditory aspects during food chewing [3]. It is an integrated perception of flavor arising from the integration of various sensory modalities. Empirical findings show that taste contributes to repurchase intention. [4]Taste contributes most to repurchase intention, with the most significant effect among sensory dimensions. Encompassing food flavor preferences, flavor variety, fresh ingredients, and expectation fulfillment, taste is the dominant multisensory factor driving consumer repurchase behavior in the culinary industry.[5]. In line with sensory marketing, which emphasizes the suitability of taste with preferences as a driver of food choice and a reinforcer of repurchase intention [3], [6].

Second, brand attachment explains the emotional pathway that drives repeat purchases beyond utilitarian evaluation. Brand attachment is conceptualized as an emotional bond characterized by affection, passion, and connection. [7]It strengthens the integration of the brand into the self-concept, so that switching brands feels psychologically costly. Empirically, brand experience is reported to have a substantial impact on emotional attachment (0.51) [8], and brand attachment drives positive evaluation and relationship quality that develop into loyalty and repurchase patterns [9]. Other evidence also shows the relevance of brand attachment to repurchase intention. [10], and its mediating function in the relationship between customer engagement and purchasing decisions [11].

Third, consumer inertia highlights habitual and automatic behavior patterns. Consumer inertia emphasizes decision-making that is automatic and not accompanied by deep cognitive evaluation, and is understood as a tendency to maintain the status quo through repeat purchases driven more by habit than by pure brand commitment. [12]. Operating through automatic thinking, an unconscious process relying on mental schemas and heuristics, consumer inertia facilitates rapid choices based on instinctive reactions rather than thorough evaluation. [13]. Through repetition, purchasing behavior becomes autopilot behavior, triggered by environmental cues without conscious cognitive involvement. [14]. This behavioral inertia is driven by the Law of Least Effort, whereby individuals prefer maintaining the status quo to evaluating alternatives. Importantly, repeat purchases often reflect spurious loyalty – false loyalty based on habit rather than genuine satisfaction. Distinguishing true loyalty from habitual repeat purchasing is essential for understanding consumer behavior, as high-inertia consumers readily switch when switching barriers are removed or better alternatives emerge. [14].

The Theory of Consumption Values framework (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991) provides a theoretical basis for the interaction among functional (taste), emotional (brand attachment), and behavioral (consumer inertia) values in consumption decisions. [15]. In heritage-brand contexts, empirical research demonstrates that symbolic and habitual components predominate over functional attributes, yet evidence reveals shifting dominance across contexts. Heritage brand research consistently indicates that symbolic and habitual components dominate functional attributes; Bale Raos Restaurant in Yogyakarta exemplifies this pattern, with brand attachment and emotional commitment driven by heritage Authenticity, cultural storytelling, and cultural preservation, which prove stronger determinants of customer loyalty than taste quality alone. [16]. However, in non-heritage food contexts, taste ($\beta = 0.658$) remains the dominant repurchase driver, as demonstrated by Mie Gacoan's research, which suggests that taste functions as either a continuous competitive differentiator or a prerequisite hygiene factor depending on business positioning. [17]. Warung Sekarmaju, occupying an intermediate position between commodity warungs (taste-dominant) and heritage establishments (emotion-dominant), presents an empirical opportunity to clarify this functional-emotional-habitual balance through simultaneous testing rather than sequential regression. Simultaneous SEM testing is methodologically essential because real-world repurchase decisions arise from the concurrent interaction of all three value dimensions, in which taste degradation cascades to erode emotional attachment, thereby weakening inertial patterns rather than from isolated effects. Prior research on food businesses has predominantly isolated taste and emotional value through separate regression analyses, thereby overlooking critical mediation mechanisms. [18], [19]. This study's contribution extends beyond diagnosing Warung Sekarmaju's specific sales decline to answering the broader theoretical question of whether traditional Indonesian warungs operate under commodity models where taste remains continuously dominant (requiring immediate quality improvement) or heritage-influenced models where taste functions primarily as a hygiene factor and emotional attachment becomes the primary leverage point for recovery.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs an explanatory quantitative design to examine the causal relationship between taste and brand attachment, as independent variables, and repurchase intention, as the dependent variable, and to explore the moderating role of consumer inertia in this relationship.[20]. The research population comprises all consumers who have purchased and consumed meatballs at Warung Sekarmaju in Cirebon Regency; however, the population size cannot be determined precisely due to the unavailability of a structured customer database. Therefore, respondents were chosen using non-probability purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) at least 17 years old and (2) having made at least two purchases in the last six months, with a target of 150 respondents to increase the robustness of the results and anticipate invalid responses, missing values, and outliers. The variables were operationalized using reflective indicators adapted from the literature and measured based on the respondents' perceptions and consumption experiences, namely: taste was measured through five sensory indicators (appearance, aroma, flavor, texture, and temperature), brand attachment measured through three dimensions (affection, passion, and connection), consumer inertia measured through three dimensions (behavioral inertia, cognitive inertia, and emotional inertia), and repurchase intention measured through three indicators (intention to repurchase, preference for the same provider, and probability of repurchase). The data used is primary data collected through a structured questionnaire containing 27 closed-ended statements with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), then analyzed using SEM-PLS (SmartPLS 4.0) through descriptive analysis, outer model evaluation (validity and reliability), inner model evaluation (explanatory power and predictive relevance), and hypothesis testing using 5,000 resampling bootstrapping, with significance decisions referring to the criteria of t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05; the composition of this paragraph is a paraphrase to improve readability while maintaining the rules of attribution in the paraphrased material [21].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 150 Warung Sekarmaju consumers who met the criteria. Demographically, the respondents were predominantly female (55.33%) and aged 19–23 years (62%), with the highest level of education being college (45.33%) and high school (30%).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Table

Characteristics	Cate	N	%
Gender	Female	83	55,33
	Male	67	44,67
Age	14-18 years	35	23,33
	19-23 years	93	62,00
	24-28 years	22	14,67
Visit Frequency	2-5 times	119	79,33
	6-10 times	19	12,67
	>10 times	12	8,00

In terms of behavior, the majority of respondents (79.33%) made purchases 2–5 times in the last six months, indicating repeated consumption and supporting the testing of the mechanism underlying repeat purchase intention in the context of heritage food.

Instrument Testing

Convergent validity testing aims to ensure that the measurement items are closely related in their representation of the desired construct.

Table 2. Instrument Test Results Table

Variables	Indicator	OL	AVE	CA	CR
Flavor	X1.1	0.823	0.684	0.887	0.916
	X1.2	0.865			
	X1.3	0.791			
	X1.4	0.811			
	X1.5	0.843			
Brand Attachment	X2.1	0.769	0.658	0.937	0.947

Variables	Indicator	OL	AVE	CA	CR
	X2.2	0.853			
	X2.3	0.874			
	X2.4	0.761			
	X2.5	0.750			
	X2.6	0.830			
	X2.7	0.822			
	X2.8	0.781			
	X2.9	0.805			
	X2.10	0.852			
	Consumer Inertia	X3.1			
X3.2		0.869			
X3.3		0.869			
X3.4		0.904			
X3.5		0.815			
X3.6		0.859			
Repurchase Intention	Y1	0.878	0.806	0.882	0.926
	Y2	0.898			
	Y3	0.917			

The results of the measurement model evaluation show that all indicators meet convergent validity and internal reliability. Outer loadings are in the range of 0.750–0.917 (>0.70), and the AVE of all constructs is above 0.50 (CT=0.684; BA=0.658; CI=0.750; RPI=0.806), so that the constructs can adequately explain the variance of the indicators. Cronbach's Alpha values (0.882–0.937) and Composite Reliability (0.916–0.947) also exceeded the threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument was consistent and suitable for structural analysis.

Results of the R Square and Adjusted R Square Tests along with F Square

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is used to evaluate the predictive power of the structural model, and the effect size (f^2) measures the unique contribution of each predictor to the R^2 of the endogenous variable.

Table 3. Table of Inner Model Evaluation Test Results

Komponen	Item	Nilai
R^2 / Adjusted R^2	Repurchase Intention (RPI): R^2	0.868
R^2 / Adjusted R^2	Repurchase Intention (RPI): Adjusted R^2	0.865
Effect size (f^2)	Brand Attachment → Repurchase Intention	0.456
Effect size (f^2)	Consumer Inertia → Repurchase Intention	0.375
Effect size (f^2)	Flavor → Repurchase Intention	0.000

The R^2 value of 0.868 for the Repurchase Intention construct indicates that the combination of taste, brand attachment, and consumer inertia accounts for 86.8% of the variance in repurchase intention, indicating strong explanatory power for the model. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.865, which is nearly identical, suggests that the explanatory power remains relatively stable after accounting for the number of predictors in the model. Meanwhile, the effect size (f^2) shows the unique contribution of each path to R^2 , where Brand Attachment → Repurchase Intention has $f^2 = 0.456$ and Consumer Inertia → Repurchase Intention has $f^2 = 0.375$ (both are significant effects), so that these two variables are the main drivers of repurchase intention. Conversely, Taste → Repurchase Intention has $f^2 = 0.000$, indicating that after controlling for other variables, the practical contribution of taste to increasing the explanatory power of the model is negligible in this research sample.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted by evaluating the structural model using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to estimate the significance of path coefficients

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results Table

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	f^2	Support
H1	CT → RPI	0.008	0.131	0.896	0.000	Not supported

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	f^2	Support
H2	BA \rightarrow RPI	0.531	6.076	0.000	0.456	Strongly supported
H3	CI \rightarrow RPI	0.431	5.041	0.000	0.375	Strongly supported
H4	CT+BA+CI \rightarrow RPI (Simultaneous)	-	-	-	-	R ² = 0.868 (Substantial)

The test results show that H1 is not supported, because the effect of taste on repurchase intention is minimal and insignificant ($\beta = 0.008$; $t = 0.131$; $p = 0.896$) and has no practical contribution ($f^2 = 0.000$). Conversely, H2 is strongly supported: brand attachment has a positive and significant effect on repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.531$; $t = 6.076$; $p < 0.001$) with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.456$), making it the most dominant predictor. H3 is also supported, where consumer inertia has a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.431$; $t = 5.041$; $p < 0.001$) with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.375$), making it the second strongest predictor. This f^2 pattern confirms the hierarchy of influence: brand attachment is the primary driver, followed by consumer inertia; practical taste does not add explanatory power to the model. Although the direct path for taste is not significant, the R^2 remains very high (0.868), indicating that emotional and habitual mechanisms together account for almost all of the variation in repurchase intention in the model. In evaluating the PLS-SEM inner model, R^2 is commonly used to assess the explanatory power of the endogenous constructs. At the same time, f^2 helps evaluate the unique contribution (practical importance) of each predictor to R^2 .

Discussion

The finding that taste does not significantly influence repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.008$; $p = 0.896$; $f^2 = 0.000$) appears to contradict assumptions in sensory marketing that taste drives food choice. However, this result aligns with contemporary research on heritage and established brands: when taste consistency is maintained, and consumer expectations are stable, taste shifts to a hygiene factor—preventing dissatisfaction but insufficient to motivate repurchase. This explanation is supported by [22], whose study on gastronomic tourism in Indonesia found that while embodied sensory experiences (taste, texture, atmosphere) are essential for baseline satisfaction, they are NOT the primary determinants of loyalty; rather, emotional attachment and place identity are. Differences with newer brand research [23], [24] Reflect brand life cycle stage effects: in new brands, taste remains an active differentiator that consumers evaluate continuously, whereas in heritage establishments like Sekarmaju, taste is perceived as "as it should be," a baseline standard rather than a competitive advantage. This pattern is consistent with FMCG trends, noting that taste remains the "foundation of consumer perception," but in mature markets, emotional components drive incremental loyalty.

Brand attachment proved to be the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.531$; $f^2 = 0.456$), confirming that heritage brand loyalty is guided primarily by emotional mechanisms. Theoretically, these results align with attachment theory and self-concept integration theory. [25], [26], wherein brand switching represents loss of psychological closeness, symbolic meaning, and emotional comfort. Recent empirical evidence strengthens this finding. [24] Conducted a quantitative study on customer loyalty at Kafe Senandung (an Indonesian heritage café), finding that brand personality and emotional attachment are strong determinants of loyalty ($\beta = 0.441$; $p < 0.05$), with emotional attachment mediating the relationship between brand personality and loyalty. Similarly, [23] Demonstrated in Indonesian restaurants in Taiwan that customer satisfaction itself, driven by food Authenticity and cultural resonance, directly influences both brand awareness and purchase intention through emotional connections formed during dining. The dominance of brand attachment among established brands can be explained by emotional capital accumulation: long-established brands, such as Sekarmaju, allow consumers sufficient time to build memories, nostalgia, and personal associations that strengthen self-brand connections.

Consumer inertia emerged as the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.431$; $f^2 = 0.375$), indicating that habitual behavior operates alongside emotional attachment in shaping repeat purchases. Theoretically, this aligns with the concept that repetitive behavior is maintained by automaticity and behavioral "scripts" triggered by familiar situations. [19] confirmed that consumer inertia functions as a positive moderator, amplifying the effects of emotional satisfaction (warm glow) on repurchase intention, with interaction $\beta = 0.149$ ($p < 0.01$). In Sekarmaju's context, operational consistency (location stability and a familiar menu) facilitates habit crystallization. Recent Indonesian gastronomic research confirms this: [22] found that in heritage dining contexts, place familiarity and repetitive sensory engagement create habitual patronage patterns that sustain loyalty independently of continuous quality

evaluation.

The R^2 value = 0.868 (Adjusted R^2 = 0.865) indicates a strong model, confirming the dual-pathway loyalty mechanism: emotional attachment and habitual automaticity are the two primary drivers of repurchase, whereas taste functions as a minimum quality prerequisite. [22] An analysis of gastronomic tourism behavior among 384 Indonesian respondents found that emotional attachment to place and embodied sensory experience mediate loyalty formation far more strongly than cognitive evaluations of taste quality alone. Recent industry analysis emphasizes that while taste remains foundational, "emotional Well-being, nostalgia, and personal values" drive incremental loyalty decisions. In heritage brands specifically, [23] Show that food Authenticity's effect on purchase intention is mediated entirely through customer satisfaction and brand awareness, NOT through direct taste evaluation, consistent with Sekarmaju's null taste effect.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examines the influence of taste, brand attachment, and consumer inertia on repurchase intention for the heritage food brand Bakso Sekarmaju in Cirebon. Using data from 150 repeat customers and PLS-SEM analysis, the results reveal a pattern that challenges conventional wisdom in food marketing. The main findings indicate that taste does not have a significant effect ($\beta = 0.008$, $p = 0.896$, $f^2 = 0.000$), while brand attachment emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.456$), followed by consumer inertia ($\beta = 0.431$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.375$). The model simultaneously explains 86.8% of the variance in repurchase intention ($R^2 = 0.868$, substantial), confirming the dual-pathway loyalty mechanism in which emotional bonding and behavioral automaticity dominate sensory evaluation. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in identifying boundary conditions in sensory marketing theory, validating the dual-pathway model with comparable, independent effects, and expanding lifecycle theory by showing that the maturity stage fundamentally alters the importance of purchase drivers. In heritage brands, taste shifts from a motivator to a hygiene factor, which is necessary but not sufficient for loyalty. Practical implications suggest that heritage brand managers should reallocate resources from product improvement to relationship-building and habit-reinforcement strategies. Emotional engagement initiatives and behavioral consistency will yield substantially greater returns than continuous taste enhancement. The limitations of this study include a single-brand focus (Sekarmaju), which limits generalizability; a cross-sectional design that cannot capture the dynamic evolution of attachment and habit formation; and the absence of mediating mechanisms that could explain the pathways more comprehensively. Future research could explore: (1) longitudinal studies to track attachment and inertia Development over time; (2) comparative studies across heritage brands with varying maturity levels; (3) the mediating role of nostalgia, Authenticity, and satisfaction; (4) moderating effects of competitive intensity and demographic factors; and (5) neuroscientific approaches to understand automaticity mechanisms at the neural level.

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