

Customer Retention Mediates Marketing Communication Effects on Repurchase Tendency among Culinary MSMEs in Bandar Lampung

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Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of marketing communication strategies on the tendency of repurchase through customer retention in culinary MSMEs in Bandar Lampung. An explanatory quantitative approach was used through a cross-cutting survey of 150 customers and analyzed with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4 and 10,000 bootstrap subsamples. The results show that marketing communication strategies have a positive and significant effect on customer retention, but their direct influence on repurchase tendencies is not significant. Customer retention has a positive and significant effect on the tendency to repeat purchases and mediates the relationship indirectly-only. The model explains 74.9% variation in customer retention and 77.6% variation in repurchase tendencies. Sensitivity analysis of 114 responses after straight-lining dispensing resulted in consistent hypothetical decisions. The findings confirm that the effectiveness of marketing communication primarily works through the sustainability of customer relationships. Culinary MSMEs need to prioritize relational communication, experience consistency, post-transaction response, and retention programs to increase the tendency to buy back sustainably for local culinary MSME customers.

Keywords: marketing communication strategy; customer retention; repurchase intention; MSMEs; Bandar Lampung

INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises in the culinary sector play an important role in the Indonesian economy because they create jobs, drive local supply chains, and provide relatively easy entrepreneurial spaces. (Salsabillah et al., 2023) The Central Statistics Agency (2024) noted that the food and beverage supply business in Indonesia in 2023 amounted to around 4.85 million units, absorbed 9.80 million workers, and generated a sales value of around IDR 998.37 trillion. The size of the market opens up growth opportunities, but at the same time increases competition between business actors. Competition does not only take place on taste and price, but also on service quality, customer experience, ease of digital interaction, consistency of messages, and the ability of businesses to maintain relationships after transactions (Silfani et al., 2024). To face this challenge, business actors need to implement innovative marketing strategies and make the most of digital technology (Malihah et al., 2024). In addition, the use of Management Information Systems (SIM) can increase their operational efficiency and competitiveness in an increasingly tight market (Fitriana et al., 2025).

Changing consumer behavior reinforces the need for integrated marketing communication. Culinary customers receive information through social media, messaging apps, food ordering platforms, customer reviews, on-site promotions, and community recommendations. In a multichannel environment, marketing communication is no longer sufficiently understood as delivering a one-way message (Schultz, 2020). Communication needs to be consistent, relevant, responsive, and in tune with the actual consumption experience. Butkouskaya, Llonch-Andreu, and Alarcón-del-Amo (2024) show that integrated marketing communications is an important capability for MSMEs because it helps businesses align market orientation, communication channels, and customer value creation.

The main problem of culinary MSMEs is not only to acquire new customers, but to retain customers who have transacted. (Putri et al., 2023) Customer acquisition that is not followed by ongoing relationships makes the cost of promotion short-lived. In the perspective of Customer

Relationship Management, communication serves to build customer knowledge, trust, attachment, and commitment. Malki et al. (2024) show that social CRM and customer satisfaction play a role in the formation of loyalty. The findings show that digital communication will be more valuable when used to respond to customers, follow up on transaction experiences, and provide relevant and personalized interactions.

Customer retention describes the sustainability of the customer's relationship with a business. Retention is not synonymous with a one-time repurchase because customers can buy back due to a momentary situation without having a commitment to the provider. Customers who retain show a tendency to choose the same provider, are less likely to switch around, and are willing to continue the relationship when there are many alternatives. (Durreab & Kulmiecđ, 2025). In the culinary business, retention can be formed through quality consistency, trustworthy communication, complaint handling, loyalty programs, and post-transaction interactions.

The tendency to repurchase is the intention of customers to buy products from the same provider again in the future. This construct is different from actual repurchase behavior that should be measured through transaction records. Because the research uses customer perception data, repurchase intent is the right term. Dash et al. (2023) show that customer experience in a digital marketing environment is related to repurchase intention. Dogra et al. (2023) also found that customer experience and value shape decisions to reuse digital food service providers. Jasin and Firmansyah (2023) emphasized that service quality and marketing mix are related to satisfaction and repurchase intention in MSME products.

While marketing communication can grab attention and increase customer knowledge, communication doesn't necessarily result in an outright repurchase tendency. Promotional messages can encourage initial visits, but the decision to return to purchase is also influenced by real experiences, such as taste, portions, price, cleanliness, atmosphere, service accuracy, and trust (Ellitan et al., 2022) (Muzacky & Muryanto, 2022). Thus, marketing communication is expected to work through relational mechanisms. Consistent communication reinforces understanding and a sense of security, then increases retention, and further drives repurchase trends. The framework is aligned with the development of digital marketing that places customer engagement and relationships as the link between communication activities and behavioral responses (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Previous research has extensively discussed digital marketing, customer engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, and repurchase intention. However, there is still a gap in the context of local culinary MSMEs. (Qu et al., 2023) (Darmawan & Matoati, 2022). First, some studies place satisfaction or engagement as a mediator, while customer retention as a relationship sustainability mechanism has not always been explicitly tested. Second, MSME marketing communication research often focuses on one digital channel and has not fully integrated message consistency, channel integration, interactivity, and relationship orientation. Third, the results of the direct relationship between marketing communication and repurchase intention are still inconsistent. Recent studies on the culinary business show that the effects of social media marketing can be insignificant directly, but significant through relational mechanisms such as customer engagement (Marco et al., 2026). This gap underlies the testing of customer retention as a mediator in the context of Bandar Lampung's culinary MSMEs.

This study examines the effect of marketing communication strategies on customer retention and repurchase intention, as well as the mediating role of customer retention among culinary MSMEs in Bandar Lampung. The theoretical framework integrates Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM). IMC explains how consistent, relevant, and coordinated marketing messages strengthen customer perceptions and engagement, while CRM emphasizes maintaining long-term relationships through continuous interaction, responsiveness, and value creation. Marketing communication may not directly lead to repurchase intention because repeat purchasing is generally formed through accumulated customer experiences and sustained relationships. Therefore, effective marketing communication can first strengthen customer retention, which subsequently increases repurchase intention.

Accordingly, customer retention serves as a mediating mechanism that transforms short-term communication effects into longer-term relational and behavioral outcomes. This integration provides a stronger theoretical explanation of the relationship between marketing communication, customer retention, and repurchase intention. Marketing communication strategies include message planning, channel selection, information consistency, interactivity, and communication adaptation to customer needs. Consistent communication helps customers form clear expectations, while quick responses reinforce the perception that the effort values relationships (Baines et al., 2021). For MSMEs, communication is also a means of maintaining closeness, reminding customers of products, and following up on transaction experiences. Therefore, a better communication strategy is expected to increase customer retention.

H1: Marketing communication strategies have a positive effect on customer retention.

Marketing communication can influence customer assessments through product information, promotions, imagery, and strengthening memories of the business. Relevant messages can lower uncertainty and increase the likelihood of customers reconsidering the same provider. However, the effect can be weakened if the actual experience doesn't match the message. Thus, the direct relationship of marketing communication strategies with repurchase tendencies still needs to be tested.

H2: Marketing communication strategies have a positive effect on the tendency to repeat purchases.

Customers who survive have a wider experience, know the quality of the provider, and face lower risk than when trying a new provider. Retention forms the relational basis for buyback decisions. Therefore, customers who have a persistent tendency are expected to show a higher tendency to repurchase.

H3: Customer retention has a positive effect on the tendency to repeat purchases.

Marketing communications don't always directly result in a buyback. Customers first assess message consistency, business response, relevance of information, and suitability of communication with consumption experience. If the evaluation is positive, the customer has a reason to maintain the relationship. Lasting relationships then increase the intention to buy again.

H4: Customer retention mediates the influence of marketing communication strategies on repurchase tendencies.

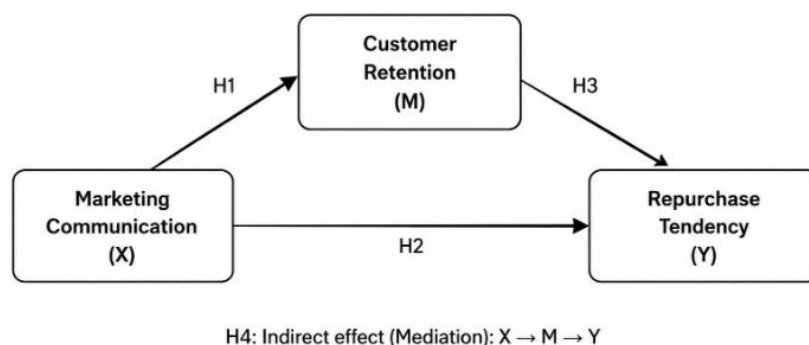


Figure 1. Structural model of research

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among marketing communication strategies, customer retention, and repurchase intention among culinary MSME customers in Bandar Lampung City. The research population consisted of customers of culinary MSMEs in Bandar Lampung. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) being at least 17 years old, (2) having purchased culinary MSME products in Bandar Lampung within the previous three months, and (3) completing the questionnaire in full. A total of 150 valid responses

met these criteria and were included in the analysis. The adequacy of the sample size was supported by an a priori statistical power consideration. For a model with a maximum of two predictors, a significance level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.80, and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), the minimum required sample is approximately 68 respondents. Therefore, the sample of 150 respondents substantially exceeded the minimum requirement and was considered adequate for estimating the proposed structural relationships using PLS-SEM.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The instrument consists of 26 indicators, namely 10 indicators of marketing communication strategy, 8 indicators of customer retention, and 8 indicators of repurchase tendency. Marketing communication strategies are positioned as exogenous constructs, customer retention as mediators, and repurchase tendencies as endogenous constructs. The entire construct is modeled reflectively.

Initial checks were carried out on data completeness, score range, coding consistency, and response patterns. No missing values or scores outside the range of 1 to 5 were found. The examination also identified 36 responses that gave identical scores on all 26 indicators or perfect straight-lining. Because the primary analysis was established using overall data that met the inclusion criteria, all 150 responses were retained. To assess whether the response pattern influenced substantive conclusions, sensitivity analysis was performed by reestimating the same model after 36 straight-lining responses were issued, so that the comparison model used 114 responses.

The analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2024). The measurement model was evaluated through outer loading, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). An outer loading of 0.70 or more is considered ideal, while an indicator with a load of 0.40 to 0.70 is evaluated based on its contribution to AVE, construct reliability, and content validity. The construct is declared to have internal reliability if Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability is at least 0.70, and has convergent validity if AVE is at least 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity was evaluated mainly through HTMT with a limit of 0.90.

The structural model was evaluated through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), path coefficient, determination coefficient (R^2), effect size (f^2), and direct, indirect, and total effects. Significance was tested using bootstrapping of 10,000 subsamples, bidirectional testing at a significance level of 5 percent, and a confidence interval of 95 percent. Mediation is judged from the specific indirect effect and the relationship between direct effects and indirect effects. When the indirect effect is significant while the direct effect is insignificant, the pattern is categorized as indirect-only mediation (Sarstedt & Moisescu, 2024). SRMR is reported as an additional model fit measure and is not used as the sole basis for acceptance of the PLS-SEM model. Sensitivity analysis uses the same construct specifications and indicators as the main model so that the change in estimation only reflects changes in the composition of the sample.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Description

All 150 responses had complete data and all scores were on a scale of 1 to 5, so there was no deletion of cases in the main model. Response pattern examination identified 36 perfect straight-lining cases, but the cases were retained to meet key analysis decisions using the overall data. The model uses 26 indicators consisting of 10 indicators of marketing communication strategy, 8 indicators of customer retention, and 8 indicators of repurchase tendency. The potential impact of straight-lining on model estimation was then examined through sensitivity analysis using 114 responses.

Table 1. Characteristics of research data

Data characteristics	Quantity	Verdict
Cumulative responses	150	Fully used
Missing value	0	No imputation
Scores outside the range of 1-5	0	No corrections
Number of indicators	26	All indicators are analyzed
Straight-lining of the entire indicator	36	Retained on the main model; Sensitivity tested
Final response	150	Used in PLS-SEM

The average of the entire construct is above 4 on a five-point scale. The marketing communication strategy has an average of 4,300, customer retention of 4,296, and a repurchase tendency of 4,329. The skewness value of the third construct is negative, which indicates the concentration of the answer in the high category. This condition reflects respondents' generally positive perceptions of marketing communication, relationship sustainability, and the tendency to make repeat purchases.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	n	Average	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness
Marketing communication strategy	150	4,300	0,634	2,000	5,000	-0,893
Customer retention	150	4,296	0,731	2,000	5,000	-0,897
Repurchase tendency	150	4,329	0,712	1,500	5,000	-1,147

Evaluation of Measurement Models

Evaluation of the measurement model shows that most indicators have an outer loading above 0.70. Two indicators of marketing communication strategies have lower loading, namely X1 of 0.631 and X9 of 0.543. X9 is the weakest indicator, but it is still maintained because AVE and the reliability of the construct of the marketing communication strategy have met the criteria, so the removal of the indicator is not necessary just to increase the statistical value. The entire construct has Cronbach's alpha above 0.90, composite reliability between 0.937 and 0.950, and AVE between 0.603 and 0.706. These results support the internal reliability and convergent validity of the model.

Table 3. Convergent reliability and validity

Construct	Indicator	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Loading range
Marketing communication strategy	10	0,924	0,937	0,603	0,543-0,858
Customer retention	8	0,936	0,947	0,693	0,742-0,891
Repurchase tendency	8	0,939	0,950	0,706	0,701-0,904

Table 4. Outer loading of the whole indicator

Construct	Code	Outer loading	Verdict
Marketing communication strategy	X1	0,631	Retained
	X2	0,835	Retained
	X3	0,858	Retained
	X4	0,824	Retained
	X5	0,795	Retained
	X6	0,841	Retained
	X7	0,843	Retained
	X8	0,824	Retained
	X9	0,543	Maintained with care
	X10	0,708	Retained
Customer retention	M1	0,887	Retained
	M2	0,787	Retained
	M3	0,742	Retained
	M4	0,799	Retained
	M5	0,862	Retained
	M6	0,891	Retained
	M7	0,849	Retained
	M8	0,829	Retained
Repurchase tendency	Y1	0,866	Retained
	Y2	0,898	Retained
	Y3	0,904	Retained
	Y4	0,897	Retained
	Y5	0,833	Retained
	Y6	0,701	Retained
	Y7	0,814	Retained
	Y8	0,786	Retained

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The HTMT value between marketing communication strategy and customer retention was 0.921, between marketing communication strategy and repurchase intention was 0.844, and between customer retention and repurchase intention was 0.928. Therefore, the marketing

communication strategy-customer retention and customer retention-repurchase intention pairs slightly exceeded the recommended 0.90 threshold, whereas the marketing communication strategy-repurchase intention pair met the 0.90 criterion based on the point estimate.

The bootstrap confidence intervals further indicate that the discriminant-validity evidence should be interpreted conservatively. The 95% intervals were 0.868-0.966 for marketing communication strategy-customer retention, 0.758-0.919 for marketing communication strategy-repurchase intention, and 0.882-0.968 for customer retention-repurchase intention. None of these intervals reached 1.00, which indicates that the constructs were not empirically indistinguishable. However, the upper confidence bounds exceeded the stricter 0.90 benchmark. Consequently, the present model should not be described as having unequivocally established discriminant validity. Instead, the results indicate a potential overlap, particularly between customer retention and repurchase intention, and the structural estimates are therefore interpreted with appropriate caution.

The theoretical boundaries of the constructs remain conceptually meaningful. Marketing communication strategy represents firm-initiated communication activities such as message planning, information consistency, channel use, interactivity, and adaptation to customer needs. Customer retention represents the continuity of the customer-business relationship and the customer's tendency to remain with the provider over time. Repurchase intention, in contrast, represents a future behavioral intention to purchase again. Thus, the constructs are theoretically related but not equivalent. The elevated HTMT values indicate that the current indicators may capture closely connected stages of the same customer relationship process. This issue is explicitly recognized in the interpretation of the findings and constitutes an important target for future refinement of the measurement instrument.

Table 5. Discriminant validity based on HTMT

Construct pair	HTMT	95% bootstrap CI	Interpretation
Marketing communication strategy - Customer retention	0.921	0.868-0.966	Potential discriminant-validity concern
Marketing communication strategy - Repurchase intention	0.844	0.758-0.919	Point estimate acceptable; inference requires caution
Customer retention - Repurchase intention	0.928	0.882-0.968	Potential discriminant-validity concern

Evaluation of the Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated using inner VIF, path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and bootstrap significance testing with 10,000 subsamples. The inner VIF for marketing communication strategy and customer retention as predictors of repurchase intention was 3.977. This value remained below the critical value of 5, indicating that collinearity was not severe enough to invalidate the structural estimates. Nevertheless, the value is consistent with the strong empirical relationship among the constructs and supports the cautious interpretation already indicated by the HTMT results.

The model showed substantial explanatory power. Marketing communication strategy explained 74.9% of the variance in customer retention ($R^2 = 0.749$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.747$). Marketing communication strategy and customer retention jointly explained 77.6% of the variance in repurchase intention ($R^2 = 0.776$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.773$). These values indicate that the proposed model accounts for a large proportion of the variation in both endogenous constructs within the study sample.

Bootstrapping results showed that marketing communication strategy had a positive and significant effect on customer retention ($\beta = 0.865$, $SE = 0.023$, $t = 37.831$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = 0.819-0.908). Therefore, H1 was supported. In contrast, the direct effect of marketing

communication strategy on repurchase intention was positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.150$, $SE = 0.115$, $t = 1.308$, $p = 0.191$, 95% CI = -0.086-0.361), so H2 was not supported. Customer retention had a positive and significant effect on repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.748$, $SE = 0.102$, $t = 7.317$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = 0.558-0.958), supporting H3. Finally, the specific indirect effect of marketing communication strategy on repurchase intention through customer retention was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.647$, $SE = 0.091$, $t = 7.077$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = 0.484-0.841), supporting H4.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing based on 10,000 bootstrap subsamples

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	Decision
H1	X → M	0.865	0.023	37.831	< 0.001	0.819-0.908	Supported
H2	X → Y	0.150	0.115	1.308	0.191	-0.086-0.361	Not supported
H3	M → Y	0.748	0.102	7.317	< 0.001	0.558-0.958	Supported
H4	X → M → Y	0.647	0.091	7.077	< 0.001	0.484-0.841	Supported

The total effect of marketing communication strategy on repurchase intention was $\beta = 0.797$ and was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.718-0.870. The specific indirect effect of 0.647 represented approximately 81.2% of the total effect, indicating that most of the overall influence of marketing communication on repurchase intention operated through customer retention. The effect-size results reinforce this pattern. Marketing communication strategy had a very large effect on customer retention ($f^2 = 2.977$), but only a small direct effect on repurchase intention ($f^2 = 0.025$). Customer retention had a large effect on repurchase intention ($f^2 = 0.626$).

Table 7. Explanatory power and effect size

Construct or path	R ²	f ²	Interpretation
Customer retention	0.749	-	High explanatory power
Repurchase intention	0.776	-	High explanatory power
Marketing communication strategy → Customer retention	-	2.977	Very large effect
Marketing communication strategy → Repurchase intention	-	0.025	Small direct effect
Customer retention → Repurchase intention	-	0.626	Large effect

Mediation and Model Fit

The mediation results show an indirect-only mediation pattern. The indirect effect of marketing communication strategy on repurchase intention through customer retention was significant, while the direct X → Y path was not significant. This pattern indicates that marketing communication was associated with repurchase intention primarily when it first strengthened the continuity of the customer relationship. In other words, customer retention is not merely an additional outcome in the model but the principal relational mechanism through which marketing communication is translated into future purchase intention.

The SRMR value was 0.095. This value is below 0.10 but above the more conservative 0.08 criterion. Accordingly, the model fit can be described as marginal or sufficient rather than excellent. Consistent with PLS-SEM practice, SRMR was treated as supplementary evidence and not used as the sole basis for evaluating the model. Interpretation therefore emphasizes the quality of the measurement model, explanatory power, effect sizes, bootstrap confidence intervals, and the consistency of the structural relationships.

Table 8. Summary of mediation and model fit

Criterion	Value	Decision	Interpretation
Indirect effect $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$	$\beta = 0.647; p < 0.001$	Significant	Indirect-only mediation
Total effect $X \rightarrow Y$	$\beta = 0.797; p < 0.001$	Significant	Strong total effect
Indirect/total proportion	81.2%	Descriptive	Indirect pathway dominates total effect
SRMR	0.095	< 0.10	Marginal/sufficient fit

Sensitivity Analysis

A sensitivity analysis was conducted to determine whether the structural conclusions depended on the 36 perfect straight-lining responses, which represented 24.0% of the full sample. The main model retained all 150 valid responses, while the sensitivity model was re-estimated using 114 responses after excluding these cases. The construct specifications and indicators were held constant so that differences between the models reflected changes in sample composition rather than changes in model specification.

Table 9. Sensitivity-analysis results

Relationship/parameter	Main model (n = 150)	Sensitivity model (n = 114)	Conclusion
$X \rightarrow M$	$\beta = 0.865; p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.823; p < 0.001$	Significant in both models
$X \rightarrow Y$	$\beta = 0.150; p = 0.191$	$\beta = 0.110; p = 0.362$	Non-significant in both models
$M \rightarrow Y$	$\beta = 0.748; p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.753; p < 0.001$	Significant in both models
$X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$	$\beta = 0.647; p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.619; p < 0.001$	Significant in both models
R ² Customer retention	0.749	0.677	Remained high
R ² Repurchase intention	0.776	0.715	Remained high

The sensitivity analysis produced the same hypothesis decisions as the full-sample model. The $X \rightarrow M$ and $M \rightarrow Y$ paths remained positive and significant, the direct $X \rightarrow Y$ path remained non-significant, and the specific indirect $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ effect remained significant. The R² values declined from 0.749 to 0.677 for customer retention and from 0.776 to 0.715 for repurchase intention. This reduction suggests that the straight-lining responses increased the apparent explanatory strength of the full-sample model, but they did not determine the direction or statistical significance of the substantive relationships. The indirect-only mediation conclusion was therefore relatively robust to the response-screening decision.

DISCUSSION

The first findings showed that marketing communication strategies had a positive and very strong effect on customer retention ($\beta = 0.865; p < 0.001$). An R² value of 0.749 indicates that most of the variation in retention can be explained by the quality of marketing communications. In the context of culinary MSMEs, communication not only functions as a promotional instrument, but also as a means of maintaining relationships after transactions. Information consistency, responsiveness, message relevance, and suitability between communication promises and consumption experiences reduce customer uncertainty and reinforce the reason to stay in touch with businesses. This finding is in line with Butkouskaya et al. (2024) who place integrated marketing communications as a strategic capability for MSMEs in producing customer-related performance.

The relational function of communication is increasingly important in the digital environment as customers interact with businesses through social media, messaging applications, reviews, and ordering platforms. Abbasi et al. (2024) show that informativeness and word of mouth in social media marketing increase customer engagement in food delivery services, which in turn is related to various behavioral outcomes. So et al. (2024) through longitudinal design also found that customer engagement has a cross-time effect on customer stickiness. Both findings support the argument that effective marketing communication works by building relational circumstances that keep customers engaged, not simply by increasing promotional exposure.

The second finding showed that the direct influence of marketing communication strategies on repurchase tendencies was not significant ($\beta = 0.150$; $p = 0.191$). These results don't mean marketing communication isn't important. In the culinary business, buyback decisions depend on a broader post-transaction evaluation, including taste, price, portions, cleanliness, service, ease of ordering, and consistency of experience. Communication can create expectations and remind customers, but it can't replace the actual experience. Dash et al. (2023) and Dogra et al. (2023) show that repurchase intent in the digital environment is shaped by more complex consumer experiences, values, and evaluations than just marketing exposure.

The insignificance of the direct path actually clarifies the relationship mechanism in the model. These findings are consistent with Marco et al. (2026) on culinary businesses in Surabaya, which shows that social media marketing activities do not generate significant direct repurchase intentions, but become effective through customer engagement. A similar pattern was reported by Asyhari et al. (2022) and Simbolon and Law (2022), which placed consumer brand engagement or customer engagement as a mediator between social media marketing and repurchase intent. Thus, communication that is only transactional, such as discounts and solicitations to buy, does not necessarily create repurchase if it does not result in an ongoing relationship.

The third finding showed that customer retention had a positive and strong effect on repurchase tendencies ($\beta = 0.748$; $p < 0.001$) with $f^2 = 0.626$. Customers who stay have greater knowledge about quality, price, service patterns, and how to transact, so the cost of finding alternatives and the risk of trying other providers is lower. In culinary MSMEs, retention can be formed through quick response, complaint handling, quality consistency, loyalty programs, post-transaction communication, and simple personalization. These results reinforce the view that repurchase intent is a consequence of repeated relationship experiences, rather than a momentary response to a promotion.

The specific indirect effect $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ was $\beta = 0.647$ and $p < 0.001$, while the direct effect $X \rightarrow Y$ was insignificant. This pattern indicates indirect-only mediation. Sarstedt and Moisesco (2024) emphasized that the PLS-SEM mediation analysis needs to assess direct effects and specific indirect effects along with the uncertainty of their estimates. In this study, about 81.2 percent of the total influence of marketing communication on repurchase tendencies took place through customer retention. This means that retention is not just an additional outcome, but is a key mechanism that transforms communication effectiveness into repurchase behavior tendencies.

Theoretically, the results of the research expand the integration of Integrated Marketing Communication and Customer Relationship Management. Marketing communication can be understood as a relational stimulus that builds customer knowledge, expectations, and closeness. Retention represents the successful effort to maintain a relationship, while the repurchase tendency is a behavioral response closer to the transaction. This contribution is important because it helps explain previous research inconsistencies regarding the direct influence of marketing communication on repurchase intention. When relational mechanisms are incorporated into the model, the influence of communication can move from a direct path to a more substantive indirect path.

Although the structural model has a high clarity power, the evaluation of the measurement model shows an HTMT X-M of 0.921 and an M-Y of 0.928. Both values indicate that the validity of the discriminator is not optimal. This proximity can be understood because relational communication, retention, and repurchase tendencies are in a series of interconnected customer

journeys, but empirically constructs still need to be differentiated more firmly. Therefore, structural results need to be interpreted with caution. The next research needs to improve the redaction of indicators so that communication items focus on company activities, retention items on relationship sustainability, and repurchase items on future transaction intentions.

The sensitivity analysis reinforces the robustness of the findings. After 36 straight-lining responses were issued, the direction and significance decisions of the entire structural pathway remained unchanged: $X \rightarrow M$ remained significant, $X \rightarrow Y$ remained insignificant, $M \rightarrow Y$ remained significant, and the indirect effects of $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ remained significant. The decrease in R^2 from 0.749 to 0.677 on customer retention and from 0.776 to 0.715 on repurchase tendencies suggests that the uniform response magnifies the apparent power of the model, but does not determine hypothetical conclusions. Thus, the indirect-only mediation mechanism remained stable at the stricter sample specifications.

The practical implication of the study is the need to change the orientation of communication from campaign-centered to retention-centered. Culinary MSMEs should integrate promotional communication with post-transaction communication, such as thank you, feedback requests, complaint follow-ups, product reminders, new menu information, loyalty programs, and benefits for existing customers. Consistency between messaging and experience should be a priority because promotions that don't match the actual experience can weaken retention. A simple customer database can also be used, with the customer's consent, to customize communications based on preferences and purchase history.

The measure of communication performance also needs to be expanded from the number of followers, impressions, and likes to indicators closer to retention, such as return rate, frequency of repeat customer purchases, response to messages, use of loyalty programs, and complaint resolution. Further research is suggested using longitudinal design and actual transaction data to test the temporal sequence of communication, retention, and repurchase. The model can also be expanded with customer satisfaction, perceived value, trust, customer experience, product quality, or customer engagement. Such an approach can strengthen the validity of the construct while explaining the part of the variation in repurchase tendencies that the current model has not explained.

CONCLUSION

Marketing communication strategies were shown to have a positive and significant effect on customer retention ($\beta = 0.865$; $p < 0.001$), but did not have a significant direct effect on repurchase tendencies ($\beta = 0.150$; $p = 0.191$). Customer retention had a positive and significant effect on the tendency to repurchase ($\beta = 0.748$; $p < 0.001$) and mediated the relationship between marketing communication strategy and the tendency to repurchase through the indirect-only mediation pattern ($\beta = 0.647$; $p < 0.001$). The model explains 74.9 percent variation in customer retention and 77.6 percent variation in repurchase tendencies. Sensitivity analysis using 114 responses resulted in the same hypothesis decision, so the structural conclusions were considered relatively robust. Key findings suggest that marketing communication provides stronger behavioral consequences when it first successfully builds the sustainability of customer relationships.

Theoretically, the research strengthens the integration of Integrated Marketing Communication and Customer Relationship Management by placing customer retention as the main relational mechanism. Practically, culinary MSMEs need to prioritize consistency of messages and experiences, quick response, post-transaction communication, personalization, complaint management, and loyalty programs. Such onboarding is more relevant to building repeat purchases than short-term promotions that are not connected to the customer experience.

Research has some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the drawing of conclusions regarding causal sequence. Second, purposive sampling and the use of perception data limit generalizations and open up the possibility of common method bias. Third, the HTMT X-M and M-Y values in the main model were above 0.90 so that the discriminant validity was not

optimal. Fourth, 36 responses showed perfect straight-lining. Although sensitivity analysis showed consistent hypothesis decisions after the case was issued, the uniform response still affected the magnitude of R^2 and the strength of the interconstruct relationship. The next study is recommended to use pilot tests, attention checks and response times, improve potentially overlapping indicators, apply longitudinal designs, and combine surveys with actual transaction data.

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