



Multisensory Experience Design in Semarang's Culinary Destinations: Its Impact on Memorable Tourism Experience and Revisit Intention

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Abstract: Culinary tourism has emerged as a vital segment of the tourism industry; however, tourist interest in Central Java's culinary sector remains relatively low (13.02%). This study investigates the implementation of multisensory experience design in Semarang's culinary destinations, explores its contribution to the formation of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), and examines its influence on revisit intention. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research engaged 30 informants through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, sensory mapping, and focus group discussions conducted at five key culinary sites. Thematic analysis revealed five dimensions of multisensory experience, with olfactory and gustatory senses being most dominant, resulting in a distinctive cultural sensoryscape specific to Semarang. The findings identify four mechanisms through which multisensory experiences contribute to MTE: sensory immersion, cultural authenticity, emotional connection, and sensory memory formation. Notably, sensory immersion emerged as a novel dimension that complements the existing MTE framework. MTE was found to influence revisit intention via three psychological pathways: memory activation, emotional bonding, and social sharing. The study culminates in a multisensory experience design framework that can be adapted by other culinary destinations across Indonesia, emphasizing the significance of local cultural uniqueness.

Keywords: multisensory experience; memorable tourism experience; culinary destination; revisit intention; cultural sensoryscape

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1. Introduction

Culinary tourism has evolved into one of the most dynamic and profitable sectors of the global tourism industry, driven by travelers' increasing demand for authentic experiences through the exploration of local cuisine [1]. In the context of Indonesia, culinary tourism possesses significant potential to contribute to local economic development. However, challenges persist in terms of tourist appeal and retention. Recent data indicate that tourist interest in Central Java's culinary sector remains relatively low at 13.02%, compared to 24.49% for cultural tourism [2]. This highlights an urgent need for innovation in culinary destination development to enhance competitiveness and visitor engagement.

The concept of multisensory experience in culinary tourism has garnered attention among academics and practitioners alike, as a holistic approach capable of creating more immersive and meaningful tourist experiences. Multisensory experiences engage all five senses sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to deliver a cohesive and memorable interaction [3]. Empirical studies have shown that multisensory stimulation can significantly enhance perceived experience quality and influence tourists' behavioral intentions, particularly their intention to revisit [4], [5].

Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) has emerged as a critical construct in understanding how tourists recall and evaluate their travel experiences. Kim et al. developed a measurement scale for MTE, encompassing dimensions such as hedonism, novelty, local involvement, and meaningfulness [6]. Subsequent research has confirmed the strong positive influence of MTE on tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, and revisit intention (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In culinary tourism, MTE assumes even greater importance due to the deep emotional and sensory dimensions often associated with food-related experiences [1].

Previous studies have examined various determinants of revisit intention in culinary tourism, including food quality, service quality, ambiance, and destination image [6],[7]. Usodo et al., in their study of Semarang, demonstrated that food product quality and destination image positively affect revisit intention, mediated by tourist satisfaction [2]. However, these studies have not fully explored the role of multisensory experiences in shaping MTE and their downstream impact on revisit behavior.

A growing body of literature has begun to explore the intersection of sensory experiences and tourism outcomes. Agapito et al. identified key sensory dimensions in tourist experiences in Portugal, emphasizing multisensory inputs as a means to differentiate destinations [3]. Similarly, Dann & Jacobsen highlighted the relevance of 'sensescapes' in constructing memorable tourism environments. Nonetheless, these studies have largely focused on conventional destinations and have not specifically addressed the application of multisensory frameworks within urban culinary contexts.

Semarang, the capital city of Central Java, offers a diverse array of culinary attractions such as Pasar Semawis, Kampung Laut, the Simpang Lima district, and Jalan Pandanaran. These destinations reflect a rich culinary heritage shaped by Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch influences. Despite its strong potential, Semarang's culinary tourism sector still struggles to deliver consistently memorable experiences and drive repeat visitation [2].

Several critical gaps have been identified in the existing literature. First, while the concept of multisensory experience has been discussed in general tourism contexts, its application to urban culinary destinations remains underexplored. Second, the interrelationship between multisensory experience design, MTE, and revisit intention has not yet been comprehensively examined. Third, no practical framework currently exists to guide the development of multisensory experiences in culinary settings, particularly within the Indonesian context. Fourth, most prior research relies on quantitative approaches, whereas a deeper understanding of how tourists interpret and internalize multisensory stimulation necessitates qualitative, exploratory methodologies.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative exploration of three central constructs: multisensory experience, MTE, and revisit intention within the specific context of urban culinary tourism in Indonesia. Methodological innovation is evident in the adoption of phenomenological inquiry combined with sensory mapping and experience design thinking, tools that remain underutilized in culinary tourism research in the Global South. This research also aims to generate a contextualized framework for multisensory experience design tailored to Semarang's culinary identity, with scalable potential for broader application across Indonesian destinations.

Accordingly, this study pursues three key objectives: (1) to analyze the implementation of multisensory experience design in Semarang's culinary destinations; (2) to explore the contribution of multisensory experiences to the formation of Memorable Tourism Experiences; and (3) to examine the impact of MTE on tourists' revisit intention. The findings are expected to offer theoretical contributions to the literature on culinary tourism and experiential consumption, while providing actionable insights for developing more competitive and sustainable culinary destinations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Multisensory Experience in Culinary Tourism

The concept of multisensory experience in tourism has gained considerable scholarly interest as a holistic approach to enhancing the overall quality of visitor experiences. Agapito et al. proposed a conceptual framework comprising five primary sensory dimensions: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile [3]. Their research in Southwest Portugal demonstrated that multisensory stimulation plays a crucial role in destination differentiation and the creation of memorable experiences. In a related domain, Krishna through an integrative review of sensory marketing, emphasized that sensory stimuli affect not only perception but also broader consumer behavior [4].

In culinary tourism, the application of multisensory experience theory is uniquely situated, as it involves direct interaction with food as the central object of experience. Stone et al. in their study on the elements of memorable culinary experiences, found that memorable culinary encounters integrate food quality, social context, and physical environment [1]. This supports the view that food-related tourism is inherently multidimensional and requires a holistic approach to experience design.

Spence et al. adopting a multisensory perspective in the retail context, demonstrated how sensory elements such as music, aroma, lighting, and texture synergistically shape consumer perceptions [5]. These findings are particularly relevant for culinary destinations, where environmental stimuli can be orchestrated to create cohesive and impactful experiential narratives.

2.2 Memorable Tourism Experience and Its Outcomes

The construct of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) was initially developed by Kim et al. in response to the growing need to understand how tourists remember and evaluate their travel experiences [8]. Their measurement scale includes seven dimensions: hedonism, novelty, local involvement, refreshment, meaningfulness, engagement, and knowledge. Subsequent cross-cultural validation by Kim confirmed the reliability and applicability of this scale in diverse tourism contexts [9].

Further research by Chandralal and Valenzuela examined the antecedents and behavioral consequences of MTE, revealing strong positive associations with word-of-mouth intentions and revisit behavior [10]. Within culinary tourism specifically, Tsai highlighted the emotionally and sensorially intense nature of food experiences, positioning them as uniquely potent forms of MTE [11].

Zhang et al. developed a model linking perceived destination image, MTE, and revisit intention, identifying MTE as a significant mediating variable [7]. Their findings offer a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how memorable experiences translate into destination loyalty.

2.3 Revisit Intention in Culinary Tourism Contexts

Revisit intention is widely recognized as a key indicator of destination loyalty and tourism sustainability. In the culinary tourism domain, factors influencing revisit behavior tend to be complex, involving deep sensory and emotional engagement. Kim and Eves in their development of a scale measuring tourists' motivations to consume local food, identified cultural experience, excitement, escape from routine, and health concerns as influential factors shaping revisit intention [6].

A quantitative study by Usodo et al. in Semarang revealed that food product quality and destination image positively influence revisit intention, with tourist satisfaction serving as a fully mediating variable [2]. Utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this study demonstrated empirical linkages among core constructs within the visitor experience domain.

Nevertheless, most existing research has yet to fully explore the role of multisensory experience in an integrated and systematic manner. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen for instance, acknowledged the complexity of sensory interactions in culinary-gastronomic

tourism but did not operationalize the multisensory concept in a theoretically rigorous way [12].

2.4 Research Gap and Positioning of This Study

A review of extant literature reveals several significant research gaps. First, although the multisensory experience concept has been investigated in general tourism and sensory marketing contexts, its application to urban culinary destinations remains limited. Second, the causal relationship among multisensory experience design, MTE, and revisit intention has not been comprehensively addressed within a unified analytical framework.

Third, prior studies predominantly employ quantitative methods, which may not capture the nuanced and subjective dimensions of how tourists interpret and internalize multisensory stimuli. Fourth, there is currently no practical framework available to guide the development and implementation of multisensory experiences in culinary settings particularly in the Indonesian context.

This study seeks to address these gaps by integrating the concepts of multisensory experience, MTE, and revisit intention within the specific context of Semarang's culinary tourism. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, combined with sensory mapping and experience design thinking, the study contributes a methodologically innovative approach to the field of culinary tourism research.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a phenomenological design to explore tourists' multisensory experiences at culinary destinations in Semarang. Phenomenology was selected due to its effectiveness in capturing the essence of individuals' subjective experiences and uncovering the meaning attributed to those experiences [13]. This design aligns with the recommendation by Agapito et al. who emphasized the importance of interpretive approaches in examining the sensory dimensions of tourism experiences [3].

A total of 30 informants were selected through purposive sampling, consisting of 20 tourists (10 local and 10 non-local visitors), five culinary business owners, and five tourism policymakers. The selection criteria for tourist participants followed the definition of culinary tourists proposed by Stone et al. referring to individuals who travel with a primary or secondary motivation to experience local food and culinary culture [1].

The research was conducted across five major culinary destinations in Semarang: Pasar Semawis, Kampung Laut, Jalan Pandanaran, Simpang Lima, and Menteri Supeno Street. These sites were chosen based on tourist visitation data and their representation of diverse culinary characteristics [2].

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide developed from the multisensory experience dimensions by Agapito et al. and the MTE scale by Kim et al. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, focusing on the exploration of sensory experiences and the meanings assigned to culinary encounters.

Observations were carried out at the five culinary destinations, emphasizing multisensory aspects: visual (aesthetics, food presentation, spatial design), auditory (soundscape, music, ambient noise), olfactory (food and environmental aromas), gustatory (taste, texture, menu variety), and tactile (food temperature, packaging materials, furniture). The observation protocol was adapted from Krishna's sensory audit framework [4].

Sensory mapping was employed to identify and document dominant sensory elements at each site [5]. This technique involved systematic recording of sensory stimuli and their intensities using a sensory wheel adapted from Dann & Jacobsen [14].

Two FGDs were conducted: (1) with eight tourists to explore multisensory experience components, and (2) with eight stakeholders to discuss strategies for multisensory experience

development. FGDs applied projective mapping techniques to facilitate discussion on sensory and emotional associations [15].

Data analysis followed the reflexive thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke [16] including: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme development, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) report writing.

The multisensory experience design framework was constructed using an experience design thinking approach [17], consisting of five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. A stakeholder validation workshop was conducted to ensure the framework's applicability and contextual relevance.

Research validity was ensured through member checking, data source triangulation, and peer debriefing [18]. A detailed audit trail was maintained to improve the dependability of the research process. A reflexivity journal was also used to monitor researcher bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

This study received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board. All participants provided informed consent after receiving a clear explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Implementation of Multisensory Experience Design in Semarang's Culinary Destinations

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews and participatory observations revealed five core dimensions of multisensory experience at Semarang's culinary destinations: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile. Among these, olfactory and gustatory dimensions emerged as dominant. These senses were integral in constructing a distinctive cultural identity for each destination.

The olfactory stimuli such as the aroma of traditional dishes like lumpia and gudeg were particularly salient. As one tourist expressed:

"The smell of lumpia and gudeg immediately reminds me of Semarang, even before I taste it" (W-07).

This indicates that smell functions not merely as a sensory input but as a trigger for cultural memory and spatial recognition. Table 1 summarizes the sensory elements, their intensity, and representative locations.

4.2 Contribution of Multisensory Experience to Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE)

Analysis identified four thematic mechanisms by which multisensory experiences contributed to MTE formation:

- a. Sensory Immersion – Deep engagement of all senses in a unified experience.
- b. Cultural Authenticity – Alignment of sensory stimuli with local culinary heritage.
- c. Emotional Connection – Affective bonding with the destination through food-related experiences.
- d. Sensory Memory Formation – Development of long-term memory associations rooted in taste and smell.

One culinary business owner explained:

"We don't just sell food, we create an atmosphere where visitors can truly feel Semarang through all their senses" (PU-03).

This emphasizes that multisensory orchestration enhances the intensity and memorability of tourist experiences.

4.3 Impact of MTE on Revisit Intention

The findings reveal three psychological pathways through which MTE influences revisit intention:

- a. Memory Activation: Strong episodic memories triggered by unique sensory experiences.
- b. Emotional Bonding: Positive affective ties with the culinary destination.
- c. Social Sharing: Desire to recount and recommend the experience, increasing social commitment to revisit.

These mechanisms suggest that MTE is not only an outcome of multisensory design but a mediator between sensory inputs and behavioral outcomes.

4.4 Synthesis and Theoretical Contributions

The study affirms Krishna’s proposition on the strategic role of multisensory integration in shaping consumer behavior [4]. Compared to nature-based tourism [3], Semarang's culinary tourism exhibits dominance in chemical stimuli namely aroma and flavor rather than visual and auditory cues.

Furthermore, the emergence of cultural sensoryscape as a new conceptual construct reinforces Everett’s view of food as a cultural medium. However, this study advances the idea by showing how local identity is embedded in coordinated sensory design [19].

The introduction of sensory immersion as a novel MTE dimension adds contextual specificity to Kim et al.’s framework, highlighting the relevance of total sensory engagement in culinary tourism [4], [6]. Meanwhile, emotional connection and memory formation reflect Scarles’ notion of embodied experience, where sensory memories are vivid, durable, and behaviorally influential [20].

The revisit intention mechanisms particularly memory distinctiveness align with memory-based decision-making theory [21] and place attachment theory [22]. Moreover, the role of social sharing expands Sthapit et al.’s model by revealing how anticipated social engagement motivates return visits [23].

5. Comparison

5.1 Methodological Advancements

This study introduces several methodological enhancements compared to existing literature in sensory experience and culinary tourism. As summarized in Table 1, it integrates phenomenology, sensory mapping, and experience design thinking a combination yet to be applied in urban culinary contexts.

Table 1. Methodological Advancements

Aspect	This Study	Agapito et al. (2017)	Stone et al. (2018)	Kim et al. (2018)
Approach	Phenomenology + Sensory Mapping	Mixed Methods	Qualitative	Quantitative
Sensory Focus	5 Integrated Dimensions	Visual-Auditory Emphasis	Gustatory-Olfactory	Not Sensory-Specific
Context	Urban Culinary Destinations	Rural Nature Tourism	Food Events	General Tourism
Framework	Experience Design Thinking	Thematic Analysis	Grounded Theory	MTE Scale
Innovation	Cultural Sensoryscape Concept	Sensory Themes	Memorable Elements	Dimensional Scale Development

The integration of design thinking enhances the **systematic identification** of dominant sensory elements beyond conventional observational techniques [19], enabling practical applications for destination managers.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions and Construct Development

Compared to the general MTE framework developed by Kim et al. [9], this study introduces the **sensory immersion dimension**, which is domain-specific and grounded in empirical evidence from culinary contexts. This adds depth to the understanding of what constitutes a memorable food tourism experience.

Table 2. Theoretical Contributions and Construct Development

Construct	This Study	Prior Work	Novel Contribution
Sensory Experience	Cultural Sensoryscape	Generic Sensory Dimensions (Krishna, 2012)	Contextualized Cultural Identity
MTE	Sensory Immersion	7-Dimensional Scale (Kim et al., 2018)	Domain-Specific Extension
Revisit Intention	Memory-Emotion-Social Mechanisms	Image-Satisfaction Model (Zhang et al., 2018)	Psychological Clarified
Framework	Multisensory Design Framework	Sensory Marketing Principles (Spence et al., 2014)	Destination-Specific Implementation

While Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen acknowledge the multisensory nature of food tourism, they do not operationalize it into measurable or designable frameworks [12]. This study fills that gap with actionable strategies and an empirically grounded framework.

5.3 Comparative Value Proposition

Distinct from Sthapit et al. [23] who explored memorable food experiences generically, this study articulates the specific role of multisensory orchestration in crafting memorability. The newly introduced concept of cultural sensoryscape provides a refined lens for interpreting how destination identity is co-constructed through sensory design.

Furthermore, while Richards [24] discusses the evolution from “food” to “foodscapes,” he stops short of offering a practical design framework. The present study bridges this theoretical-practical divide with a scalable model applicable across Indonesia’s culinary destinations.

In contrast to predominantly quantitative studies such as Chen & Rahman [25], this research yields a deep contextual understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which sensory experiences translate into tourist loyalty. It therefore extends the field’s methodological, theoretical, and practical frontiers.

6. Conclusion

This study successfully identified five primary dimensions of multisensory experience within Semarang’s culinary destinations, with olfactory and gustatory senses showing the greatest dominance in establishing the city’s unique destination identity. The findings indicate that coordinated implementation of multisensory experience design significantly contributes to the formation of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) through four core mechanisms: sensory immersion, cultural authenticity, emotional connection, and sensory memory formation. Further analysis demonstrates that MTEs shaped by multisensory stimulation influence revisit intention via three distinct psychological pathways namely, memory activation, emotional bonding, and social sharing mechanisms.

The synthesis of these findings comprehensively addresses the study’s three research objectives. First, the analysis of multisensory design implementation revealed that Semarang’s culinary landscape exhibits a unique cultural sensoryscape, where culinary heritage is integrated with contemporary experiential innovation. Second, the contribution of

multisensory experiences to MTE is evident in the emergence of *sensory immersion* as a new and distinctive dimension, complementing existing MTE frameworks. Third, the influence of MTE on revisit intention is substantiated through the identification of specific psychological mechanisms that transform memorable experiences into behavioral outcomes.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expansion of sensory experience theory within the context of culinary tourism by introducing the concept of *cultural sensoryscape* and identifying *sensory immersion* as a new dimension in the MTE framework specific to the culinary tourism domain. Practically, the research presents a multisensory experience design framework that can be employed by destination managers to optimize visitor experiences through systematic sensory audits, cultural sensoryscape design, and multisensory orchestration that ensures a coherent and emotionally resonant experience journey.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. It is geographically limited to the city of Semarang, and the use of a qualitative methodology constrains the generalizability of its findings. Future research is encouraged to validate the proposed framework through mixed-method approaches across diverse urban culinary contexts in Indonesia. Additionally, further exploration of the moderating effects of tourists' cultural backgrounds on the perception of multisensory experiences offers a promising research direction. The development of quantitative measurement instruments for operationalizing *cultural sensoryscape* and *sensory immersion* will enrich the methodological toolkit for future studies in sensory tourism. Longitudinal research exploring the durability and evolution of sensory memories in shaping long-term destination loyalty would also provide critical insights for the development of sustainable culinary tourism strategies.

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Daftar Pustaka

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