



VISUAL PROMISE AND ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH CONGRUENCE IN INDONESIAN CAFÉS

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Abstract

Digital café marketing increasingly relies on visual content and public reviews, yet aesthetic appeal alone does not establish whether a brand promise is credible. This study examines congruence between visual promises and electronic word of mouth in Indonesian café marketing and identifies how review language reflects visit-related signals. A qualitative-dominant comparative multiple-case design was applied to 60 digital traces, comprising 40 firm-generated units and 20 public reviews from Giyanti Coffee Roastery, One Eighty Coffee & Music, Kudos Cafe, and KYND Community Seminyak. The data were analyzed through multimodal content analysis, within-case interpretation, negative-case analysis, and cross-case pattern matching. The findings show that ambience and experiential promises were consistently confirmed, product quality was largely confirmed with one qualification, and symbolic claims concerning authenticity, lifestyle, price, and ethics often lacked sufficient consumer-generated evidence. Review language mainly reflected realized repeat visitation, explicit revisit intention, and recommendation, indicating that review platforms capture loyalty and advocacy more directly than first-visit planning. The study develops a dimension-specific congruence framework that extends signaling theory and digital customer value research. For café managers, the framework provides a practical basis for aligning visual communication with verified customer experience and identifying under-communicated strengths or credibility gaps.

Keywords: *visual promise; electronic word of mouth; café marketing; digital customer value; signaling theory; visit-related signals*



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1. Introduction

Digital platforms increasingly shape how consumers evaluate cafés before physical visitation. Before entering a venue, potential customers can inspect products, interiors, service cues, prices, ratings, and review narratives across interconnected digital touchpoints. This mediated evaluation is especially consequential for cafés because product quality, ambience, service comfort, functional convenience, and social suitability cannot be fully verified before consumption. In Indonesia, extensive internet and social media use has strengthened the strategic importance of digital visibility for hospitality and food-service businesses (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kemp, 2025).

The growing prominence of visually attractive café spaces has popularized the notion of Instagrammability, which emphasizes aesthetic appeal, visual shareability, and social media attractiveness. However, café value can also arise from product craftsmanship, service reliability, functional comfort, price fairness, authenticity, community identity, and ethical meaning. To capture this broader proposition, visual promise is defined as the set of brand-controlled visual and textual cues that communicates expected product, spatial, experiential, functional, symbolic, or value-related benefits. This concept treats visual branding as a strategic meaning system rather than decorative presentation alone (Prasetia, 2026).

Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) provides externally generated evidence through public ratings, reviews, recommendations, complaints, and experience narratives. Unlike official content, this evidence is produced outside direct brand control and can confirm, qualify, contradict, or fail to address a communicated promise. From the perspective of Signaling Theory, official digital content functions as a sender-controlled signal under conditions of pre-visit uncertainty, whereas E-WOM functions as observable feedback that can strengthen or weaken the credibility of that signal. Congruence therefore refers to dimension-specific correspondence between the value promised by the café and the experience evidence expressed by consumers (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021; Connelly et al., 2025; Filieri et al., 2021; Spence, 1973).

Recent hospitality research has clarified several mechanisms through which digital content influences restaurant evaluation. Visual attention research shows that firm-posted images and user opinions attract attention, while review valence shapes how carefully consumers inspect platform information (Simonetti & Bigné, 2022). Foodstagramming research demonstrates that aesthetic appeal, goal relevance, mimicking desire, perceived popularity, and content credibility can contribute to restaurant visit intention (Chen et al., 2024; Hasanein & Montaser, 2025). Research on perceived digital customer value further indicates that restaurant value is multidimensional and includes price, hedonic, experiential, transient, and service-quality components (Helal et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

Despite these advances, the literature remains primarily oriented toward the persuasive effects of visual appeal, review valence, content credibility, or post popularity on overall evaluation and behavioral intention. Such approaches do not directly establish whether a specific brand-controlled promise is supported by consumer-generated evidence concerning the same value dimension. A favorable service review, for example, cannot validate a claim of coffee authenticity, while an attractive product image cannot confirm parking convenience or price fairness. General positivity may therefore conceal dimension-specific inconsistency, and the absence of relevant review evidence may be misinterpreted as either confirmation or failure. A more precise framework is required to distinguish correspondence, qualification, contradiction, insufficient evidence, and the absence of a material promise (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2024; Filieri et al., 2021; Hasanein & Montaser, 2025; Simonetti & Bigné, 2022).

To address this gap, this study introduces visual promise and E-WOM congruence as a case-by-dimension analytical framework for café digital marketing. The framework compares firm-generated promises with consumer-generated experience evidence and classifies each dimension as confirmed, qualified confirmation, contradicted, not evidenced, or no material visual promise. This design differs from earlier research by shifting the analytical focus from general persuasive effects to dimension-matched correspondence, by separating insufficient evidence from contradiction, and by identifying positive customer-recognized value that may remain under-communicated in official content. It also distinguishes explicit revisit intention, realized repeat visitation, and recommendation because public reviews predominantly represent post-consumption expressions rather than direct measures of first-visit planning. Figure 1 presents the relationship among the two digital signal systems, congruence states, digital customer value, and visit-related signals (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

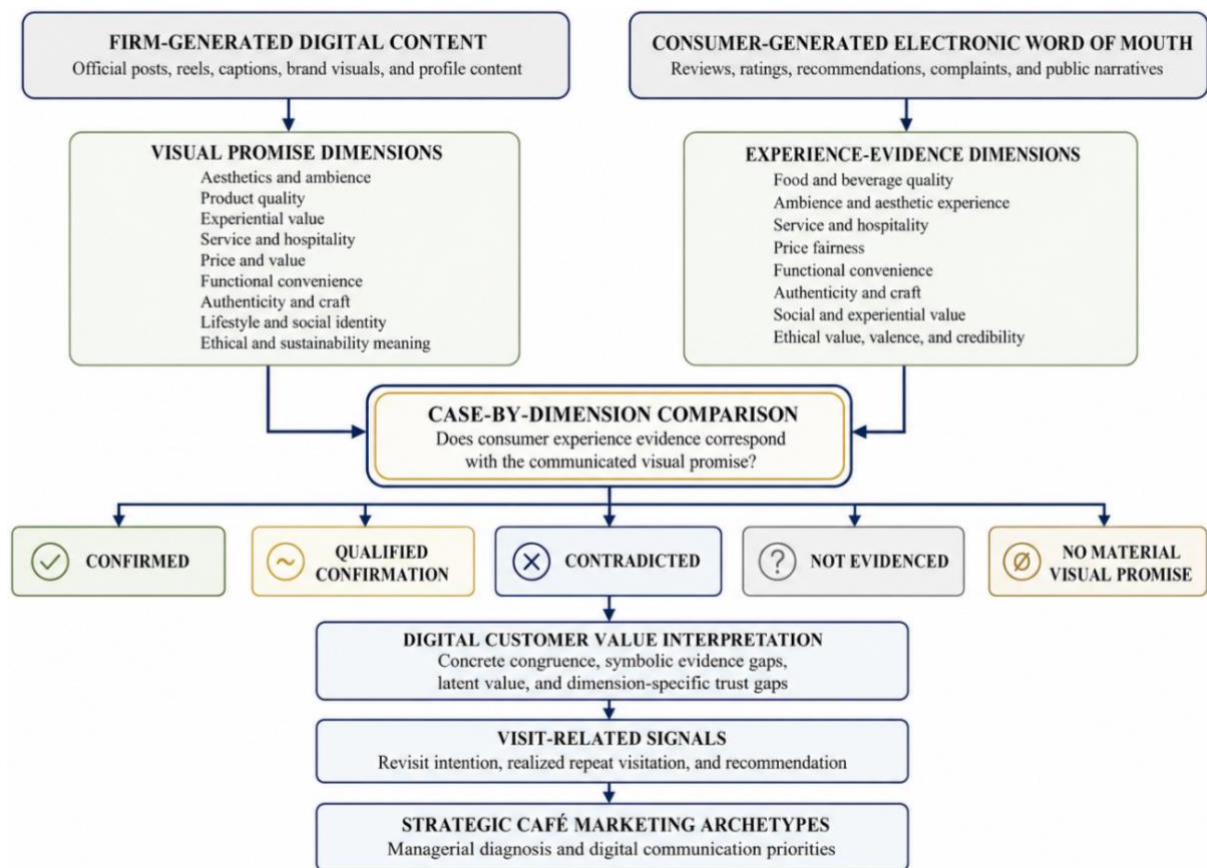


Figure 1. Analytical framework of visual promise and electronic word of mouth congruence

Source: Developed from relevant signaling theory, E-WOM, digital customer value, and visual branding literature (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021; Connelly et al., 2025; Filieri et al., 2021; Helal et al., 2024; Prasetya, 2026; Spence, 1973).

The framework is applied to four Indonesian café cases that represent contrasting promise architectures and digital positioning patterns. The analysis addresses how visual promises align with public E-WOM across specific value dimensions and how review language reflects revisit intention, realized repeat visitation, and recommendation. The theoretical contribution lies in extending Signaling Theory from general signal credibility toward the dimension-specific comparison of brand-controlled signals and external experience evidence, while the managerial contribution lies in identifying credible promises, under-communicated strengths, and trust gaps. The study does not claim causal effects or statistical representation because the evidence consists of bounded public digital traces. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to develop and apply a visual promise and E-WOM congruence framework that explains how Indonesian cafés can build more credible, evidence-aligned digital customer value.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative-dominant comparative multiple-case design to examine dimension-specific congruence between visual promises communicated by café brands and experience evidence expressed through public electronic word of mouth (E-WOM). The design was selected because the research objective required interpretive comparison of firm-generated and consumer-generated digital signals rather than causal estimation or measurement of population-level consumer behavior. A multiple-case structure enabled within-case interpretation and cross-case comparison across cafés with contrasting promise architectures. The analytical procedure combined structured multimodal content analysis, negative-case analysis, and cross-case pattern matching (Ridder, 2020; Stier et al., 2020).

The cases comprised Giyanti Coffee Roastery in Central Jakarta, One Eighty Coffee & Music in Bandung, Kudos Cafe at Pakuwon Square in Surabaya, and KYND Community Seminyak in Bali. Criterion sampling required every case to have an identifiable Indonesian location, publicly accessible official digital content, visible public review evidence, and a distinguishable marketing proposition. Maximum-variation sampling was then applied to capture contrasting configurations of authenticity and craft, immersive spatial experience, functional comfort, and plant-based lifestyle branding. This selection logic supported theoretical comparison across different forms of café value rather than numerical representation of the Indonesian café population (Ridder, 2020).

Table 1. Case Selection and Digital Evidence Corpus

Case and location	Promise architecture	Firm-generated units	Review units	Public sources	Comparative role
Giyanti Coffee Roastery, Central Jakarta	Authenticity, craft, and calm experience	10	5	Instagram, website, and Google-attributed reviews	Specialist-coffee case
One Eighty Coffee & Music, Bandung	Immersive ambience and social experience	10	5	Instagram and Google-attributed reviews	Spatial-experience case
Kudos Cafe, Pakuwon Square, Surabaya	Functional comfort and social dining	10	5	Instagram, Facebook, and Google-attributed reviews	Functional-value case
KYND Community Seminyak, Bali	Plant-based products and lifestyle identity	10	5	Instagram, website, and Google-attributed reviews	Lifestyle-symbolism case
Total	Four maximum-variation cases	40	20	Public secondary digital traces	Comparative case analysis

Source: Authors' evidence ledger based on publicly accessible official café accounts and Google-attributed review displays, frozen in June 2026.

The final corpus consisted of 60 publicly accessible secondary digital traces, including 40 firm-generated content units and 20 public E-WOM units. A firm-generated unit consisted of an official post, reel, caption, profile statement, website element, or brand visual that communicated a discernible product, spatial, experiential, functional, symbolic, or value-related promise. An E-WOM unit consisted of a public review containing interpretable experience evidence concerning at least one analytical dimension. Equal unit allocations were maintained across the four cases so that cafés with greater posting volume or review visibility did not dominate the comparative analysis.

The observation period for firm-generated content extended from January 1, 2025, to May 31, 2026, and the evidence corpus was frozen in June 2026. Ten official content units were retained for each café through relevance-based purposive selection that considered the clarity of the communicated promise, variation across content formats, and coverage of different value dimensions. Repetitive posts that reproduced substantially similar messages without adding analytical information were not prioritized. This procedure produced a bounded but varied representation of the promise architecture communicated by each case during the observation period.

Five public review units were retained for each café from the relevance-sorted Google-attributed review display available during evidence freezing. The fixed allocation corresponded with the maximum of five reviews returned in a relevance-sorted Place Details legacy response and created a symmetrical E-WOM window across the four cases (Platform, 2026). The reviews were treated as a platform-bounded public snapshot rather than a random sample of customers or a complete record of consumer opinion. Review units located outside the firm-generated observation period were marked as temporal boundary cases and interpreted as part of the café's cross-sectional public reputation rather than as evidence of exact temporal correspondence.

The corpus size was predetermined to support balanced case comparison and was not presented as evidence of statistical representativeness or complete thematic saturation. Analytical adequacy was assessed through four design considerations: equal coverage across cases, variation among firm-generated promise dimensions, the presence of aspect-level evaluative language in the review units, and sufficient cross-source evidence to conduct repeated case-by-dimension comparisons. The 40 official units enabled observation of recurring and contrasting promise patterns, while the 20 review units supplied bounded external evidence for testing whether those promises were supported, qualified, opposed, or left unaddressed. The findings therefore indicate patterns within the frozen corpus and do not estimate the prevalence of those patterns among all posts, reviews, customers, or Indonesian cafés (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023; Ridder, 2020).

Each unit was documented in an evidence ledger containing the café, platform, unit type, publication or review date, capture date, source address, paraphrased evidence summary, preliminary code, and analytical note. Separating the source record from the interpretive note allowed every coding decision to be traced back to the corresponding

digital evidence. Review texts were paraphrased to avoid unnecessary reproduction of user-generated content, while reviewer names, profile images, and other personal identifiers were excluded from the manuscript. These procedures followed the principles of data minimization, contextual integrity, anonymity protection, and responsible reporting of publicly accessible digital traces (Franzke et al., 2020).

The coding framework distinguished visual-promise dimensions from consumer-experience dimensions. Firm-generated units were coded for aesthetics and ambience, product quality, experiential value, service and hospitality, price and value, functional convenience, authenticity and craft, lifestyle and social identity, ethical and sustainability meaning, and information clarity. E-WOM units were coded for food and beverage quality, ambience, service, price fairness, functional convenience, authenticity, social and experiential value, ethical value, textual valence, credibility, and visit-related language. Visit-related language was separated into explicit revisit intention, realized repeat visitation, recommendation, and other observable expressions to avoid treating all post-visit statements as equivalent measures of prospective visitation.

An illustrative coding sequence demonstrates how source evidence was converted into a congruence judgment. An official Giyanti unit emphasizing in-house roasting and coffee origin was coded primarily as an authenticity-and-craft promise and secondarily as a product-quality promise. Review evidence referring to consistent coffee quality, specialist credibility, and repeated patronage was coded under authenticity, product quality, and realized repeat visitation. Because the official promise and review evidence converged on the same dimension without material opposing evidence, authenticity and craft were classified as confirmed. In contrast, review evidence concerning full park at One Eighty was coded as negative functional-convenience evidence and contributed to qualified confirmation because the problem created bounded friction without overturning the broader experiential and functional evidence.

The analysis proceeded through five stages. First, all source units were frozen, recorded, and paraphrased to distinguish observable evidence from interpretation. Second, firm-generated and E-WOM units were coded separately so that official promises were not inferred from consumer reviews and consumer experience was not inferred from brand communication. Third, corresponding codes were compared within each case and dimension. Fourth, negative evidence and temporal boundary cases were reviewed before a final congruence status was assigned. Fifth, cross-case pattern matching was used to identify recurring configurations and develop the strategic café marketing archetypes (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

Congruence classifications were based on the direction, directness, recurrence, and contextual weight of the evidence rather than on a mechanical frequency threshold. A dimension was classified as confirmed when consumer-generated evidence directly and consistently supported a material visual promise without meaningful opposing evidence. Qualified confirmation indicated that supportive evidence remained dominant but coexisted with a bounded criticism, condition, or operational friction. Contradicted

indicated that direct consumer evidence materially opposed the communicated promise, while not evidenced indicated that a material promise lacked corresponding consumer-generated evidence within the corpus. No material visual promise was assigned when the official corpus did not communicate the dimension strongly enough to justify promise-based comparison, even when reviews mentioned related customer value.

Primary coding was completed by one analyst, and no intercoder reliability coefficient was calculated because the corpus was not independently coded by multiple raters. To reduce unchecked interpretive subjectivity, a structured procedural audit was conducted by the second author after the initial coding was completed. The audit examined a proportionally stratified subset of 12 evidence units, consisting of eight firm-generated units and four E-WOM units distributed across all cases, and rechecked all 36 case-dimension congruence judgments against the evidence ledger and operational definitions. Any uncertainty was resolved by returning to the frozen source, the paraphrased evidence summary, and the applicable decision rule, while revisions to coding decisions were documented in the audit trail (Carcary, 2020; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Trustworthiness was further supported through explicit case boundaries, a documented evidence trail, stable operational definitions, separation between evidence and interpretation, negative-case analysis, and conservative reporting of unsupported dimensions. The procedure did not assume that absent review discussion represented customer dissatisfaction or that positive overall sentiment validated every promise dimension. Interpretive claims were retained only when the corresponding evidence could be located within the bounded corpus. These safeguards strengthened credibility and confirmability without presenting the analysis as statistically representative or mechanically objective (Carcary, 2020; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

The study remained subject to several methodological boundaries. Public digital traces could reveal observable platform communication but could not establish private motivations, first-visit decision processes, verified offline behavior, or the views of customers who did not publish reviews. Platform sorting and visibility also shaped which review evidence became accessible during the evidence-freezing process. The four cases and the observation period were selected for analytical contrast rather than national coverage. Consequently, the findings support analytical generalization to the proposed visual promise and E-WOM congruence framework, not statistical generalization to all cafés or consumers.

4. Results and Discussion

Visual Promise Profiles Across Café Cases

The analysis of 40 firm-generated digital content units revealed four distinct visual promise architectures rather than a uniform dependence on aesthetic intensity. The sampled cafés communicated value through different combinations of product expertise,

spatial experience, functional utility, social meaning, and symbolic identity. From a signaling perspective, these official cues functioned as sender-controlled representations intended to reduce pre-visit uncertainty and direct consumer attention toward selected dimensions of café value. Their prominence within official content did not, however, establish credibility because validation required comparison with independently expressed consumer experience evidence (Connelly et al., 2025; Prasetya, 2026).

Giyanti Coffee Roastery displayed the most pronounced authenticity-and-craft signal architecture within the sampled official content. Repeated references to in-house roasting, coffee origin, production knowledge, consistency, and a calm social setting positioned specialist competence as the central source of value. The restrained visual style functioned less as a promise of spectacle and more as a competence signal that associated the café with expertise, product seriousness, and experiential familiarity. This pattern indicates that visual communication can remain strategically distinctive without relying on intense decoration when the content repeatedly communicates a recognizable form of expertise (Connelly et al., 2025; Prasetya, 2026).

One Eighty Coffee & Music communicated an experience-led signal architecture through water-based dining, poolside ambience, live music, slow-afternoon imagery, service attention, and social gathering occasions. These cues enabled prospective visitors to imagine not only the physical setting but also the anticipated rhythm and social use of the venue. In Signaling Theory, vivid and observable spatial cues can reduce uncertainty regarding atmosphere because the promised experience becomes easier to visualize before consumption. At the same time, a highly immersive promise raises expectations that food quality, service execution, accessibility, and other operational elements will support the experience presented in official content (Chen et al., 2024; Connelly et al., 2025; Simonetti & Bigné, 2022).

Kudos Cafe presented a composite signal architecture that combined product, functional, comfort, and community-related benefits. The sampled content included handmade pasta, menu variety, coffee learning, daily availability, comfort food, art-related activities, sustainability-associated objects, and a home-like atmosphere. This configuration communicated the café as an adaptable setting for dining, working, learning, and social interaction rather than as a destination defined by a single visual attraction. Such operationally oriented cues can become diagnostically useful because functional convenience, service accessibility, and product reliability are directly assessable during consumption, although a broad promise architecture may require consistent communication to prevent the brand message from becoming diffuse (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

KYND Community Seminyak communicated the most symbolically dense product-and-lifestyle architecture among the four cases. Colorful plant-forward food, customizable bowls, founder-associated narratives, customer imagery, social consumption, and women-led identity connected product presentation with lifestyle participation and organizational meaning. These cues created a recognizable identity by

combining visually observable products with more interpretive claims concerning community, ethics, and social positioning. Signaling Theory suggests that such symbolic claims require stronger external corroboration because lifestyle and ethical meaning are less directly verifiable during a single consumption encounter than product appearance or spatial ambience (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024; Prasetya, 2026).

The cross-case comparison therefore identified a continuum between relatively concrete and relatively symbolic visual promises. Giyanti emphasized specialist competence, Kudos highlighted functional and operational usefulness, One Eighty foregrounded immersive experience, and KYND combined product visibility with lifestyle symbolism. Concrete signals can be evaluated through directly observable outcomes such as product quality, comfort, service, or convenience, whereas symbolic signals depend more heavily on consumer interpretation and repeated external confirmation. The central finding is consequently not that one café possessed a stronger visual identity than another, but that different promise architectures generated different evidentiary requirements before their credibility could be established through electronic word of mouth (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

Congruence Between Visual Promise and Consumer Experience Evidence

The congruence analysis generated 36 case-dimension judgments by comparing material visual promises with corresponding consumer-generated experience evidence. The matrix contained 16 confirmed judgments, 3 qualified confirmations, 10 not-evidenced judgments, and 7 judgments with no material visual promise, while no dimension was classified as contradicted. After the seven dimensions without a material promise were excluded, 19 of the remaining 29 promise dimensions received full or qualified consumer support, whereas 10 lacked corresponding E-WOM evidence. This distribution indicates that consumer evidence supported more material promises than it left unverified, although the pattern did not establish universal credibility across every value dimension.

From a signaling perspective, confirmed and qualified judgments indicate different degrees of external reinforcement for brand-controlled signals. Confirmation occurred when consumer narratives supported the same value dimension communicated in official content, whereas qualified confirmation indicated that a broadly supported promise coexisted with bounded criticism or operational friction. A not-evidenced judgment represented unresolved signal credibility because the official promise was identifiable but corresponding consumer evidence was insufficient within the corpus. No material visual promise indicated that official content did not communicate the dimension strongly enough to permit promise-based evaluation, regardless of whether consumers independently mentioned related value (Connelly et al., 2025).

Table 2. Cross-Case Visual Promise and Electronic Word of Mouth Congruence Matrix

Dimension	Giyanti	One Eighty	Kudos	KYND	Cross-case interpretation
Aesthetics and ambience	C	C	C	C	Confirmed in all cases
Product quality	C	Q	C	C	Confirmed in three cases and qualified at One Eighty
Experiential value	C	C	C	C	Confirmed in all cases
Service and hospitality	NP	C	C	NP	Consumer-recognized value exceeds sampled official promise in Giyanti and KYND
Price and value	Q	NP	NP	NE	Qualified at Giyanti; not evidenced at KYND
Functional convenience	NP	Q	C	NP	Confirmed at Kudos; qualified at One Eighty
Authenticity and craft	C	NE	NE	NE	Confirmed only at Giyanti
Lifestyle and social identity	NE	C	NE	NE	Confirmed only at One Eighty
Ethical and sustainability meaning	NP	NE	NE	NE	No case received confirmation

Note: C = Confirmed; Q = Qualified confirmation; NE = Not evidenced; NP = No material visual promise.

Source: Authors' analysis of publicly accessible secondary digital traces, 2026.

Table 2 demonstrates that aesthetic and ambience promises were confirmed in all four cases, while experiential value produced the same complete confirmation pattern. Product quality was confirmed for Giyanti, Kudos, and KYND, whereas One Eighty received qualified confirmation because favorable product evidence coexisted with one assessment of average food quality. These dimensions produced the strongest congruence because consumers could directly encounter and describe the physical setting, product performance, and lived experience during a café visit. When E-WOM addresses the same observable attribute communicated by official content, the consumer narrative becomes diagnostically useful for evaluating signal credibility rather than merely adding general positive sentiment (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021; Filieri et al., 2021).

Concrete value dimensions generated stronger validation because such attributes provide relatively accessible evidence during consumption. Ambience can be assessed through spatial comfort and atmosphere, product quality through sensory experience, service through staff interaction, and functional convenience through access, payment, seating, or work suitability. These attributes also provide consumers with specific language that can be transferred easily into public reviews. The resulting correspondence supports digital customer value research by showing that the credibility of a communicated benefit depends partly on whether customers can observe, interpret, and narrate that benefit after consumption (Helal et al., 2024).

Symbolic dimensions produced weaker and less consistent validation because authenticity, lifestyle identity, ethical meaning, and sustainability are not always directly

verifiable through a single visit. Giyanti was the only case in which authenticity and craft achieved confirmation because official references to roasting, coffee origin, and expertise corresponded with review evidence concerning product consistency and specialist credibility. One Eighty achieved confirmation for lifestyle and social identity because consumer narratives recognized the venue as a setting for social use and shared experience. By contrast, several lifestyle, authenticity, and ethical promises remained not evidenced because the review corpus did not contain sufficiently direct consumer language concerning the same symbolic meaning.

The pattern does not imply that symbolic promises were inaccurate. Symbolic claims require stronger translation into observable customer-facing practices before consumers can recognize and reproduce the intended meaning in E-WOM. Ethical identity, for example, may remain invisible when official communication presents organizational values without connecting those values to practices that customers can encounter during the service experience. Lifestyle positioning may also generate attractive imagery without producing review language that explicitly identifies participation in the promoted identity. In signaling terms, the signal may remain salient in official communication but insufficiently verifiable from the receiver's observable experience (Connelly et al., 2025).

The matrix also revealed customer-recognized value that exceeded the sampled official promise. Positive service evidence appeared for Giyanti and KYND even though service was not identified as a material visual promise in the sampled official content. KYND also received positive functional evidence concerning dietary suitability and practical confidence, although functional convenience was not sufficiently emphasized to support a promise-based judgment. These no-material-promise cases should therefore not be interpreted as missing performance, because some cases reveal latent value that consumer narratives recognized more clearly than official communication.

Negative-case analysis produced three formal qualified confirmations. Giyanti received a price-and-value qualification because premium pricing was viewed as relatively high but remained acceptable in relation to the experience, while One Eighty received product-quality and functional-convenience qualifications because positive evidence coexisted with average food assessment and parking friction. The review concerning limited work suitability at Giyanti was retained as a practical boundary, but it did not create a qualified-confirmation judgment because functional convenience was not a material visual promise for that case. This distinction preserves consistency between the qualitative interpretation and the classifications reported in Table 2.

The absence of contradicted judgments should not be interpreted as evidence of flawless performance or complete brand credibility. The classification only indicates that the bounded, relevance-sorted review corpus did not contain sufficiently direct and recurring evidence that materially opposed an identified visual promise. Contradictory experiences may exist outside the accessible review snapshot, and platform sorting may affect which narratives become visible during evidence collection. The findings therefore

describe dimension-specific correspondence within the frozen corpus and do not estimate the frequency of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or mismatch among the wider customer population (Stier et al., 2020).

Interpreting Not Evidenced and No Material Visual Promise

The *not evidenced* and *no material visual promise* categories represented different communication conditions and should not be interpreted as equivalent weaknesses. Of the 10 *not-evidenced* judgments in Table 2, nine concerned authenticity and craft, lifestyle and social identity, or ethical and sustainability meaning, while one concerned price and value. The seven *no-material-visual-promise* judgments were distributed across service and hospitality, price and value, functional convenience, and ethical and sustainability meaning. This distribution indicates that insufficient consumer verification was concentrated primarily in symbolic promises, whereas the absence of a material promise occurred across both operational and symbolic dimensions.

Several plausible mechanisms may explain why a material promise remained *not evidenced* within the bounded corpus. Symbolic attributes may have been difficult for consumers to observe during a single visit, the intended meaning may not have been translated into customer-facing practices, or review authors may have prioritized more immediate experiences such as food, ambience, and service. Platform sorting and the limited review window may also have reduced the visibility of relevant narratives even when such experiences existed outside the accessible corpus. These explanations remain interpretive possibilities rather than directly observed causal mechanisms because the study did not interview consumers about why particular dimensions were omitted from their reviews.

From a signaling perspective, *not evidenced* represents unresolved signal credibility rather than a failed or contradicted signal. A promise may be visually prominent and strategically meaningful, but its credibility remains incomplete when receivers do not reproduce or recognize the same meaning in observable E-WOM. This condition is especially relevant for authenticity, lifestyle, ethics, and sustainability because these claims require cues that consumers can encounter, understand, and describe after consumption. The absence of matching review language therefore indicates an evidentiary gap between sender intention and publicly expressed receiver interpretation, not proof that the underlying claim is false (Connelly et al., 2025).

The *no material visual promise* category originated from a different condition on the sender side of the signaling process. It indicated that the sampled official content did not emphasize a dimension consistently or clearly enough to establish a promise for congruence assessment. Positive service evidence for Giyanti and KYND, together with functional evidence for KYND, demonstrates that consumers may recognize value that remains under-communicated in official content. However, isolated positive review statements should not be converted automatically into new brand promises because the operational strength may not yet be sufficiently consistent or strategically distinctive. This

category can therefore indicate latent digital customer value, deliberate positioning boundaries, or an opportunity for evidence-based expansion of official communication.

The two categories require different managerial responses. When a strategically central promise is classified as *not evidenced*, managers should translate the claim into observable service practices, concrete proof, accessible information, and customer experiences that can be evaluated without interpretive ambiguity. When a dimension is classified as *no material visual promise*, managers should first verify whether the consumer-recognized value is recurring and operationally reliable before incorporating it into official content. Periodic comparison of new content and review evidence can then determine whether a dimension moves toward confirmation, remains unresolved, or should be removed from the communication strategy. This category-specific approach prevents managers from treating review silence as failure while also discouraging unsupported symbolic claims and opportunistic amplification of isolated positive comments (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

Visit-Related Signals and Platform Meaning

The analysis identified 12 coded visit-related expressions within the 20-review corpus. Five expressions were classified as self-reported repeat visitation, four as explicit revisit intention, and three as recommendation or visit-worthiness endorsement. No expression was classified as first-visit intention, planned social visitation, or conditional intention. This distribution reflects the post-consumption orientation of the bounded review corpus rather than the complete process through which consumers form visitation decisions.

Self-reported repeat visitation referred to retrospective language indicating previous regular, repeated, or long-term patronage, although such statements were not verified through transaction, reservation, or location records. Explicit revisit intention referred to forward-looking language expressing willingness or desire to return, but did not establish that a subsequent visit occurred. Recommendation referred to outward-facing advocacy that encouraged or endorsed visitation by other consumers and did not necessarily indicate the reviewer's own intention to return. Separating these categories prevents public review language from being treated as a uniform proxy for prospective intention or independently verified behavior.

Giyanti accounted for four visit-related expressions, which represented the strongest self-reported repeat-visitation pattern among the four cases. Three review units contained language indicating regular or long-term patronage, while one additional unit expressed return-oriented worthiness and was classified as explicit revisit intention. This pattern provided public linguistic evidence of sustained attachment to the café's authenticity, product, and experiential value. Nevertheless, the evidence supports an interpretation of reported customer attachment rather than a verified estimate of visitation frequency or customer retention.

Kudos produced two explicit revisit-intention expressions that appeared alongside positive evidence concerning interior calmness, work suitability, helpful service, food and beverage quality, affordability, and payment convenience. The correspondence suggests that practical utility can provide consumers with concrete reasons for expressing a desire to return, rather than return-oriented language arising only from aesthetic or hedonic appeal. Functional value may therefore contribute to favorable future-oriented evaluations when the venue remains useful across dining, working, and social situations. Because these expressions were prospective, they should not be interpreted as completed repeat visits.

KYND generated four visit-related expressions comprising one self-reported repeat-visitation statement, one explicit revisit intention, and two recommendations. This combination reflected both personal return orientation and outward-facing advocacy, while demonstrating that recommendation and revisit intention occupy different positions in post-consumption evaluation. One Eighty generated one self-reported repeat-visitation statement and one recommendation, while the other reviewed experiences did not contain explicit visit-related language. The absence of additional return or recommendation language did not weaken its confirmed ambience, service, and social-experience evidence because favorable experience evaluation can occur without an explicit statement about future action.

From a signaling perspective, visit-related expressions provide secondary evidence concerning how brand-controlled signals were interpreted after consumption. Self-reported repeat visitation can reinforce the apparent durability of experienced value, explicit revisit intention indicates positive future orientation, and recommendation indicates advocacy toward other potential consumers. However, none of these expressions establishes that a visual promise caused the first visit, produced a later visit, or generated verified loyalty behavior. The signals therefore complement the congruence matrix by indicating post-consumption responses associated with particular value dimensions, rather than functioning as behavioral outcome measures.

The findings clarify the platform-dependent meaning of visitation language in digital café research. Survey and experimental studies commonly measure prospective willingness to visit after exposure to visual or review stimuli, whereas public reviews are generally produced after a consumption experience. Review-based traces are consequently more suitable for examining reported repeat patronage, return orientation, and advocacy than for reconstructing first-visit planning. This distinction connects the proposed framework with established visit-intention research while preserving the methodological boundary between observable language, stated intention, and verified behavior (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021; Hasanein & Montaser, 2025).

Strategic Archetypes and Managerial Implications

The final analytical stage combined the congruence matrix, negative cases, under-communicated value, and visit-related expressions into four strategic café marketing archetypes. These archetypes are interpretive configurations rather than statistical

clusters, performance rankings, or claims about the complete market position of each café. Their purpose is to identify which dimensions should be preserved, corrected, made more observable, or withheld from stronger promotion. Table 3 summarizes the resulting diagnoses and converts them into immediate operational priorities.

Table 3. Strategic Congruence Archetypes and Operational Priorities

Café	Strategic archetype	Congruence profile	Visit-related expressions	Key diagnostic	Operational priority
Giyanti Coffee Roastery	Understated Authenticity	4 C; 1 Q; 1 NE	Three self-reported repeat-visitation expressions and one revisit intention	Price-and-value qualification, lifestyle evidence gap, and work-use boundary outside formal congruence	Preserve craft communication, explain premium value, and clarify expected practical-use conditions
One Eighty Coffee & Music	Qualified Experiential Positioning	4 C; 2 Q; 2 NE	One self-reported repeat-visitation expression and one recommendation	Food-quality and parking qualifications, with authenticity and ethical claims not evidenced	Improve product consistency, publish clearer arrival information, and communicate symbolic claims only when supported by observable practices
Kudos Cafe, Pakuwon Square	Underleveraged Functional Value	5 C; 0 Q; 3 NE	Two explicit revisit-intention expressions	Validated operational value, with authenticity, lifestyle, and sustainability claims not evidenced	Prioritize work, family, service, comfort, and product benefits before expanding symbolic positioning
KYND Community Seminyak	Selective Lifestyle Positioning	3 C; 0 Q; 4 NE	One self-reported repeat-visitation expression, one revisit intention, and two recommendations	Price, authenticity, lifestyle, and ethical claims not evidenced, while service and functional	Make symbolic practices observable and verify recurring service and dietary-access evidence before

Café	Strategic archetype	Congruence profile	Visit-related expressions	Key diagnostic	Operational priority
				value remain under-communicated	amplifying those benefits

Note: C = Confirmed; Q = Qualified Confirmation; NE = Not Evidenced.

Source: Authors' analysis of publicly accessible secondary digital traces, 2026.

Giyanti represents understated authenticity because its most differentiated promises concerning craft, product quality, ambience, and experience received corresponding consumer evidence without relying on intense visual spectacle. The price-and-value qualification indicates that premium positioning requires clearer communication of what customers receive in exchange for the price paid. The work-suitability comment should be treated as a practical-use boundary rather than a formal congruence qualification because functional convenience was not a material official promise. Management should therefore preserve specialist authenticity, explain the components of premium value, and communicate expected use conditions without repositioning the café as a broadly functional workspace.

One Eighty represents qualified experiential positioning because its ambience, experiential value, service, and social identity were confirmed, while food quality and functional convenience contained bounded friction. The central managerial issue is not the attractiveness of the experience promise but the risk that operational inconsistency may weaken its credibility. Product delivery should be reviewed for recurring variation, while arrival and parking information should be made visible before visitation to reduce avoidable uncertainty. Authenticity or ethical positioning should not be intensified unless those claims are connected with practices that customers can directly encounter and describe.

Kudos represents underleveraged functional value because five dimensions were confirmed and its two visit-related expressions concerned an explicit desire to return. Its differentiated opportunity lies in operational benefits that consumers can evaluate directly, including comfort, service, product performance, and practical usability. Official communication should give greater prominence to these validated benefits before expanding authenticity, lifestyle, or sustainability narratives that remain unsupported within the corpus. This approach would concentrate communication on existing customer-recognized value rather than introducing symbolic claims that require additional evidence.

KYND represents selective lifestyle positioning because visually observable product, ambience, and experiential promises were confirmed, while broader price, authenticity, lifestyle, and ethical meanings remained not evidenced. The result does not require abandonment of lifestyle branding, but it indicates that symbolic identity should be translated into practices that are visible during the customer experience. Positive service and functional evidence may constitute under-communicated value, particularly

in relation to dietary suitability, but isolated review statements should not be converted immediately into new promises. Management should first determine whether these strengths recur across a broader review window and remain operationally consistent before integrating them into official communication.

Across the four cases, the framework can be operationalized through a recurring dimension-level congruence audit. Managers should first identify the material promises appearing in current posts, captions, profile information, and official websites, and then map recent review language against the same dimensions. Each dimension should subsequently be classified as confirmed, qualified, contradicted, not evidenced, or no material visual promise before communication and operational responses are selected. The audit should be repeated at regular intervals or after a major campaign so that content strategy reflects current customer evidence rather than historical assumptions.

The required response depends on the classification obtained. Confirmed promises should be preserved and supported with fresh evidence, while qualified promises require operational correction and clearer expectation management. Not-evidenced promises should be made more observable, supported with verifiable information, or reduced when they cannot be substantiated through customer experience. Consumer-recognized value without a material official promise should be monitored for recurrence before it is incorporated into brand communication.

Online review management should focus on aspect-level learning rather than on overall ratings alone. Recurring comments concerning product consistency, access, price, service, or practical use should be recorded by dimension and connected with the responsible operational process. Responses to reviews should acknowledge specific concerns and clarify corrective information without presenting isolated criticism as population-level evidence. This procedure allows E-WOM to function as a diagnostic input for both communication and service improvement rather than merely as promotional social proof.

The strategic archetypes consequently translate Signaling Theory into a managerial decision process. Brand-controlled content identifies the value that management intends to signal, while public E-WOM indicates which dimensions customers recognize, qualify, omit, or independently discover. Credible digital marketing emerges when communication is adjusted according to the evidentiary status of each dimension rather than according to visual intensity or general review positivity alone. This approach connects signal credibility with multidimensional digital customer value and provides a more disciplined basis for café communication strategy (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study developed and applied a visual promise and electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) congruence framework to explain how Indonesian cafés communicate and validate digital customer value. The findings demonstrate that credibility depends on

correspondence between a specific brand-controlled promise and consumer-generated evidence concerning the same value dimension. Concrete attributes such as ambience, product quality, experiential value, service, and functional convenience were more readily validated because customers could observe and describe them during consumption. Symbolic promises concerning authenticity, lifestyle, price, ethics, and sustainability required more explicit and observable customer-facing evidence before comparable validation could emerge.

The principal theoretical contribution lies in extending Signaling Theory from general assessments of signal attractiveness or credibility toward dimension-specific comparison between sender-controlled communication and receiver-generated experience evidence. The framework distinguishes *confirmed*, *qualified confirmation*, *contradicted*, *not evidenced*, and *no material visual promise* as analytically different conditions. This distinction prevents review silence from being interpreted as contradiction and reveals customer-recognized value that may remain under-communicated in official content. The framework also connects signal credibility with multidimensional digital customer value by demonstrating that different promises require different forms of external verification (Connelly et al., 2025; Helal et al., 2024).

The managerial contribution is a structured congruence audit that enables café managers to evaluate communication and customer experience at the dimension level. Confirmed promises can be preserved and reinforced, qualified promises require operational correction and expectation management, while *not-evidenced* promises should be made more observable or reduced when sufficient verification cannot be generated. Customer-recognized value without a material official promise should be monitored for recurrence and operational consistency before being incorporated into stronger promotional communication. This process allows online reviews to function as diagnostic input for content strategy and service improvement rather than merely as general indicators of popularity.

The findings remain bounded by the use of four purposively selected café cases, a defined observation period, and a limited corpus of publicly accessible secondary digital traces. Platform sorting and review visibility influenced which consumer narratives were available, while the study could not examine private motivations, customers who did not post reviews, verified transaction histories, or independently confirmed visitation behavior. The use of one primary analytical workflow, despite the documented procedural audit, also limits claims of coding independence. Consequently, the findings support analytical generalization to the proposed framework rather than statistical generalization to all Indonesian cafés, digital audiences, or hospitality consumers (Stier et al., 2020).

Future research should test the framework through larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal platform data, independent coding teams, consumer surveys, interviews, reservation records, and verified visitation measures. Comparative studies across cities and café segments could determine whether congruence patterns vary according to market position, consumer profile, or digital platform. The framework

should also be examined in hotels, restaurants, tourism destinations, and retail businesses where visual promises and public experience evidence influence pre-consumption expectations. Such extensions would clarify the external applicability of the framework and determine whether dimension-specific congruence consistently strengthens credible digital customer value across service industries.

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