

The Role of Local Food Souvenirs in Enhancing the Image of Sustainable Tourism Village and Tourist Loyalty: Evidence from Indonesian Tourism Villages

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24922/eot.v13i2.01>

Article Info

Submitted:
August 15th 2025
Revised:
February 20th 2026
Accepted:
April 6th 2026

Abstract

Tourism villages play a key role in Indonesia's sustainable tourism development, especially in the post-pandemic era. While previous studies have examined local food, destination image and tourist loyalty separately, empirical research that integrates all three subjects within a single structural model remains limited, particularly in the context of tourism villages. This study addresses this gap by investigating how local food souvenirs influence tourist loyalty, both directly and indirectly through the image of sustainable tourism villages. A quantitative approach was employed using a structured online questionnaire administered to domestic tourists who had previously visited tourism villages in West Java and Central Java. These regions were selected due to their high concentration of established and emerging tourism villages as well as their strong emphasis on community-based tourism development. A total of 226 valid responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The results indicate that local food souvenirs have a strong and significant positive effect on the image of sustainable tourism villages and a significant direct effect on tourist loyalty. Furthermore, the image of sustainable tourism villages partially mediates the relationship between local food souvenirs and tourist loyalty. The structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power, with R^2 values of 0.542 for image of sustainable tourism village and 0.390 for tourist loyalty. These findings suggest that local food souvenirs act as cultural and sustainability symbols that shape tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions. Strengthening sustainability narratives and community involvement embedded in food souvenirs can enhance the image of sustainable tourism village and foster long-term tourist loyalty.

Keywords: local food souvenirs; sustainable tourism village; tourist loyalty; destination image; community-based tourism



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INTRODUCTION

Background

Tourism villages, or *desa wisata*, have emerged as a vital component of Indonesia's sustainable tourism strategy, aiming to develop community-based tourism rooted in the local culture, traditions and environmental conservation. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism villages have played a pivotal role in Indonesia's strategy for economic recovery and resilience. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy identified *desa wisata* as a flagship initiative for revitalizing the tourism sector, emphasizing their direct impact on local communities and potential to attract visitors through their unique cultural and natural experiences (Pranyoto, 2023). Studies in two cities which are Kampung Labirin Tourism Village in Bogor and Serang Village have shown that by leveraging community-based tourism, enhanced the sustainable livelihoods and built resilience against future crisis (Acharysyah et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2024). These examples underscore the strategic importance of *desa wisata* in fostering economic recovery, promoting sustainable development and enhancing community resilience in the post-pandemic era.

According to the official platform Jadesta (*Jejaring Desa Wisata*), by 2023 Indonesia had registered over 4,000 tourism villages, achieved the status of independent or developing tourism destinations. These villages are recognized for their ability to showcase their local identity while contributing to economic resilience, especially post-pandemic. The government, through programs such as *Anugerah Desa Wisata Indonesia* (ADWI), has provided incentives and promotions to accelerate tourism village development. This initiative evaluates tourism villages based on seven assessment aspects: visitor attractions, homestays, public toilets, souvenirs-unique local products including culinary offerings, digital and creative elements,

cleanliness, health, safety and environment (CHSE), and institutional governance (Jadesta, 2022).

Despite their growth, many tourism villages still face some challenges in maintaining competitiveness and ensuring visitor's return. While infrastructure and attractions may draw initial interest, long-term sustainability often depends on the experiential quality offered to visitors. One untapped potential is the utilization of local food heritage, particularly through food souvenirs that encapsulate the village's identity and serve as lasting impressions of the visit. Empirical evidence from rural tourism studies indicates that memorable food-based experiences play a critical role in shaping destination image, tourist satisfaction and revisit intention, suggesting that culinary elements are not merely complementary attractions but core experiential drivers (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Moreover, souvenirs, including local culinary products, have been increasingly acknowledge as strategic instruments for cultural sustainability, economic empowerment and destination differentiation, particularly in rural and community-based tourism contexts (Qiu et al., 2024). This brings us to the focus of this research which is to explore how local food souvenirs can reinforce the image of a sustainable tourism village and foster tourist loyalty. The image of a tourism village is shaped through stakeholder collaboration and the integration of local resources. Previous studies show that co-creation among stakeholders play a crucial role in forming a consistent and positive image (Handini et al., 2025)

In recent years, sustainable tourism development has gained global attention, emphasizing the importance of preserving local culture, environment and economic vitality. A vital yet often underutilized component of this sustainability narrative is local food heritage-particularly in the form of food souvenirs. These products are not merely consumables but also presented as cultural artifacts that embody the value,

stories and traditions of a community. Guan et al. (2019) highlighted the concept of food heritagization, where local foods are reinterpreted as an edible heritage, shaping not just tourist experience but also contributing to rural sustainability.

Moreover, the consumption of heritage food contributes significantly to the experiential value of tourism. Research by Mohammad et al. (2022) in Terengganu, Malaysia, indicated that the heritage food consumption and the associated experiential value positively influence tourists' attitudes, destination image and behavioral intention. This suggests that engaging local culinary practices provide tourists with meaningful experiences that deepen their connection to the destination, thereby fostering loyalty. A comparable finding in rural tourism contexts shows that gastronomy is a key destination attribute of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), significantly influencing revisit and recommendation intentions through emotional arousal and memory formation (Huang & Bu, 2022).

Studies in the Indonesian context have confirmed that food souvenirs hold a strong symbolic value and significantly influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Suhartanto et al. (2018) found out that factors such as authenticity, taste, uniqueness and cultural relevance of food souvenirs directly affect tourists' satisfaction and their behavioral intentions such as revisiting and recommending the destination. Meanwhile, recent study also argued that souvenirs play a critical role in enhancing local cultural sustainability, although it comes with different variation of souvenirs (Qiu et al., 2024). When tourists perceive food souvenirs as reflective of local identity, they become emotionally engaged with the destination, leading to a stronger attachment and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Moreover, food souvenirs also play a role in placing the branding. According to (Pizzichini et al., 2020), food souvenirs contribute to place identity by representing intangible aspects such as tradition,

sustainability and ethical values, enhancing the perceived image of the destination. This perception is critical because the image of a destination significantly shapes tourist attitudes and behaviors. As previous research noted, a positive destination image can stimulate revisits, recommendations and also forming the basis of destination loyalty (Gursoy et al., 2014).

Research Objectives

Despite the growing literature on tourism and local food, empirical studies jointly examine the relationship between local food souvenirs, the image of sustainable tourism villages and tourist loyalty within a single integrated model remain limited. Most existing studies tend to analyze these constructs in isolation or focus on urban and mass tourism destinations, leaving the tourism village context, particularly in Indonesia, underexplored. Moreover, the mediating role of sustainable tourism village image in explaining how local food souvenirs influence tourist loyalty has received limited empirical attention.

Therefore, to address these gaps, this study aims to investigate whether local food souvenirs can shape the perceived image of sustainable tourism villages, directly enhance tourist loyalty and indirectly influence tourist loyalty through the mediating role of village image. This research employs the SmartPLS method to assess the relationships among the three key constructs. Understanding these relationships will provide a holistic perspective on how local food souvenirs can function as strategic assets in tourism development, contributing to both academic insight and practical implication for destination managers and local communities.

The concept shown below (Figure 1) has been drawn based on the results of previous research on the literature review regarding local-based food souvenirs, the image of sustainable tourism village and tourist loyalty. This research uses a quantitative approach.

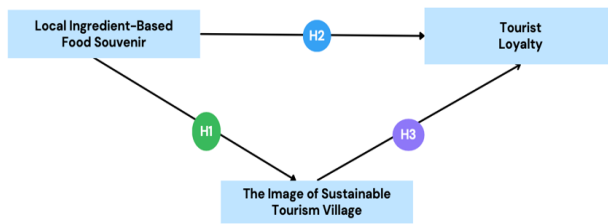


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- H1: Local food souvenirs have a significant positive effect on the image of sustainable tourism village.
- H2: Local food souvenirs have a significant positive effect on the tourist loyalty.
- H3: Local food souvenirs positively influence tourist loyalty through the mediating role of image of sustainable tourism village.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Food Souvenirs

Local food souvenirs have evolved from simple gifts to strategic tourism assets that reflect the identity, culture and sustainability of a destination. These products serve as sensory and emotional triggers that help tourists recall their experiences and deepen their attachment to a place (Suhartanto et al., 2018). The integration of locally sourced ingredients not only to strengthen the authenticity of these souvenirs but also to support local economies and traditions, a key pillar of sustainable tourism. Moreover, Gursoy et al. (2014) and Campón-Cerro et al. (2017) asserted that experiential quality derived from culturally rooted products like souvenirs significantly affect tourists' emotional responses. When tourists engage these products, they develop stronger emotional bonds with the destination, contributing to a more favorable perception. In particular, the use of traditional ingredients and production methods enhances perceived authenticity, which is positively associated

with destination satisfaction and loyalty.

Local food souvenirs help destinations differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market. Food souvenirs and local ingredients are not just commodities, the carriers of cultural heritage and identity. In Ethiopia, Enset based culinary tourism is seen as a means to conserve a traditional farming system, biodiversity and food heritages (Woyesa & Kumar, 2022). Similarly, in Italy, the "Marche Food and Wine Memories" project preserves the oral memories and culinary heritage of former sharecroppers, enhancing the cultural landscape and tourist experience (Cerquetti et al., 2022). The cultural significance of food is also evident in the way it is presented and consumed. In Yunnan Village, traditional foods are reinvented as edible examples of the local culture, satisfying the nostalgia of urbanite visitors (Guan et al., 2019). This approach not only preserves cultural traditions but also creates a unique selling point for the destination.

Moreover, the production and marketing of these souvenirs are often tied to the image of sustainable tourism villages. When tourists perceive that a destination is committed to sustainability, they are more likely to engage with and support local products, including food souvenirs. This alignment of values between the destination and the tourist fosters a sense of trust and appreciation, which also can lead to increased tourist loyalty (Zakiah et al., 2023). Suhartanto et al. (2018) identified five core dimensions-authenticity, taste, uniqueness, brand/packaging and value-that significantly influence tourists' satisfaction and post-purchase intention. Packaging that reflects the destination identity and communicates product origin not only enhances perceived authenticity but also strengthens memory linkage between the food and the visited location. Additionally, Pizzichini et al. (2020) emphasized that tourists seek authenticity and cultural immersion through food products, often valuing them as symbols of place which

increases their emotional engagement with the destination.

Image of Sustainable Tourism Village

The image of a tourism destination is the result of both cognitive (beliefs, perception) and affective (feelings) evaluations (Chiu et al., 2016). For a destination to be seen as sustainable, it must consistently communicate its environmental values, community engagement and cultural authenticity. Food heritage, particularly local food products, contributes significantly to this image by offering direct, memorable engagement with a destination's culture and sustainability ethos. The perceived image of a tourism village affects tourist's satisfaction and loyalty (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Oppermann, 2000). When tourists experience a consistent positive image through authentic food products, they are more likely to form strong emotional attachments, resulting in an increased likelihood of revisitation and recommendation.

In line with the framework proposed by Gursoy et al. (2014), destination image can act as a mediating variable between experiential attributes and loyalty. This mediating role is particularly important in the context of the image of sustainable tourism villages, where tangible expressions of culture-such as food-are among the primary channels through which image is communicated and perceived.

Tourists increasingly value products that are produced in environmentally responsible ways and support local economies. Ethical attributes, such as eco-sustainability, support for small businesses and fair production practices enhance the symbolic value of food souvenirs and influence tourists' perception of a destination's sustainability values. According to Suhartanto et al. (2018), the more tourists perceive food souvenirs as socially and environmentally responsible, the more likely they are to view the destination positively, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty. This ethical engagement adds moral satisfaction to the act of purchasing and

aligns with broadening trends in responsible tourism consumption.

The integration of local ingredients and food souvenirs into the tourism experience significantly enhances the image of sustainable tourism villages. In Bali and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the alignment of values demonstrated in the image of sustainable tourist villages encourages tourists to engage in and support sustainability (Zakiah et al., 2023). Moreover, local food souvenirs serve as a condensed representation of the lifestyle and cultural spirit of the local people, thereby enhancing the cultural image of a tourism village. This cultural authenticity is able to attract tourists in seeking genuine experiences, thus boosting the village's image as a sustainable tourism destination (Gana & Hussain, 2024; Zhang et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the heritagization of local foods, where traditional food is packaged and reproduced as souvenirs, can effectively promote the village's cultural heritage. This process not only sustains rural tourism but also reinforces the village's identity as a custodian of cultural heritage. By offering local food souvenirs, tourism villages can stimulate local economies. The sale of these souvenirs contributes to the financial independence of local entrepreneurs and supports sustainable economic development, which is a key aspect of a sustainable tourism village image (Guan et al., 2019; Sidali et al., 2015).

Tourist Loyalty

Tourist loyalty refers to tourists' intentions to return to a destination and to recommend it to the others. It is a critical measure of destination competitiveness and long-term sustainability. According to Oppermann (2000), loyalty is influenced not only by tourists' satisfaction with their experiences but also by their emotional and symbolic connection to the place. In the context of tourism experience, recent studies emphasize the importance of sensory and emotional engagement in shaping tourist behavior. Susanto et al. (2025) found

that embodied gastronomic experiences such as taste, texture and direct interaction with local food are the strongest predictors of emotional attachment and tourist loyalty. In contrast, digital engagement alone has only a marginal influence, indicating that authentic, experience-based elements play a more critical role in sustaining tourist loyalty than promotional or virtual strategies.

Food, as a medium of cultural engagement, plays an essential role in building these connections. Studies show that food souvenirs influence repeat visitation because they serve as the lasting reminders of positive experiences (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; Suhartanto et al., 2018). Additionally, food-based engagement facilitates post-travel conversation and word-of-mouth promotion, further reinforcing loyalty. Gursoy et al. (2014) destination loyalty model suggested that affective responses-rooted in emotional and sensory engagement-are critical in determining tourist loyalty. Thus, when tourists perceive food souvenirs as high-quality, authentic and meaningful, they are more likely to associate those positive attributes with the destination itself, leading to greater loyalty.

Furthermore, tourist loyalty encompasses intentions to revisit, recommend and share positive experiences. These behavioral indicators are well-supported in tourism research. Suhartanto et al. (2018) found that satisfaction of food souvenirs is significantly related to intentions to return and recommend the destinations. Moreover, Yang et al. (2022) further elaborated that foodscapes-comprising the production, presentation and symbolism of local food-play a key role in building emotional bonds and loyalty by fostering trust and perceived authenticity. In the context of digital communication, Ismarizal & Kusumah (2023) found that Instagram plays a crucial role in shaping tourist destination choices and loyalty. Social media interactions, such as sharing photos and writing reviews, amplify destination exposure and

reinforce positive word-of-mouth, especially among younger travelers who use digital channels to extend their travel narratives.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between local food souvenirs, the image of sustainable tourism villages and tourist loyalty. The research was conducted over a three-months period, from March to May 2025 with Bandung, West Java, serving as the research base. The field of study covered tourism villages located in West Java and Central Java, two regions known for their established and emerging tourism villages. Respondents were tourists who had previously visited tourism villages in these regions and were asked to evaluate their overall experience of tourism villages based on their most recent visit, rather than a single specific destination. Data collection was carried out through a close ended structural online questionnaire survey, enabling broad distribution and efficient data acquisition. The use of a structured survey is well-suited to quantitative research objectives, allowing for the systematic measurement of variables and testing of hypothesized relationships using statistical modeling. This approach supports empirical validation of theoretical frameworks in tourism studies, especially within the context of destination image assessment and tourist loyalty.

Sampling

This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique with a screening filter to ensure that only respondents with relevant experience were included in the analysis. Respondents were required to have visited at least one tourism village in West Java or Central Java within the past 12 months. Data were collected through an online survey targeting adult domestic tourists who could be reached via

social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups and tourism-related community networks. This approach is commonly used in tourism and consumer behavior research when experience-based eligibility is required to obtain full and reliable responses. To ensure respondent relevance, a screening question was applied at the beginning of the questionnaire asking if respondent have ever visited a tourism village. Only respondents who answered “yes” were allowed to proceed with the survey.

The target sample size was set at a minimum of 200 respondents, based on recommendations from Hair et al. (2022) for structural equation modeling using SmartPLS, which requires a minimum sample size of ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at a construct in the model. A total of 248 responses were collected during the one-week online survey distribution period, from March 14 to March 21, 2025. After data screening, 226 valid responses were retained for final analysis, while 22 responses were excluded due to ineligibility of incomplete data. Although the sample was dominated by students and younger respondents, this reflects the characteristics of domestic tourists who are more active on digital platforms and online survey channels. As the study focuses on examining structural relationships between constructs rather than the population-level estimation, the sample is considered adequate for PLS-SEM analysis. Nevertheless, the dominance of younger respondents is acknowledged as a limitation and future studies are encouraged to include more diverse age groups and occupational background to enhance generalizability.

Measurement

Furthermore, the measurement instrument was developed based on previously validated scales in tourism and marketing literature. All indicators were adapted and contextually adjusted to suit the tourism village setting and the study objectives. To ensure clarity and consistency, the questionnaire wording was carefully refined to match the Indonesian tourism village context and the characteristic of domestic tourists. In total, 16 indicators were used to measure three constructs which are local food souvenir (LFS), image of sustainable tourism village (ISTV) and tourist loyalty (TL).

In this study, local food souvenirs (LFS) represent tourists' evaluation of food souvenir attributes, such as taste, packaging, authenticity and symbolic value. In contrast, the image of sustainable tourism village (ISTV) reflects tourists' overall perception of the tourism village, particularly in terms of sustainability practices, cultural preservation and community support. Although several ISTV indicators refer to food souvenir production, these items are intended to capture tourists' perception of how the tourism village manages sustainability and community involvement, rather than their evaluation of the food souvenirs themselves. Therefore, LFS focuses on the product level, while ISTV captures a broader village-level image, maintaining a clear conceptual distinction between the predictor and the mediating construct. Specific indicators for each construct are shown below (Table 9.). All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. Each variable and its corresponding indicators are defined operationally as follows:

Table 1. Research Variables and Indicators

Variables	Operational Definition	Indicators
Local Food Souvenir (LFS)	Tourists' perception of local food souvenirs in terms of authenticity, uniqueness and symbolic value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The presence of local ingredients is important in my decision to purchase food souvenirs 2. The taste of food souvenirs is unique and distinctive 3. The taste of food souvenirs reminds me of my experience in the tourism village 4. The packaging of food souvenirs is attractive 5. The packaging reflects the identity of the tourism village 6. The packaging clearly states the ingredients and origin of the product
Image of Sustainable Tourism Village (ISTV)	Tourists' perception of the tourism village's sustainability, ethics and support for local community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tourism villages implement environmentally friendly practices 2. The food souvenirs are produced sustainably without harming the environment 3. The food souvenirs promote local natural resources responsibly 4. The food souvenirs made from local ingredients reflect the unique culture of the tourism village 5. The production of food souvenirs supports the local community 6. The local community is actively involved in producing and promoting the food souvenirs
Tourist Loyalty (TL)	Tourists' intention to revisit, recommend and advocate for the tourism village	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am considering visiting the tourism village more than once 2. I will recommend the tourism village I have visited 3. I am willing to share my experience about the tourism village on social media 4. I will post a positive review of the tourism village I have visited on online platforms

Source: Suhartanto et al. (2018), Guan et al. (2019), Pizzichini et al. (2020), Yang et al. (2022)

Data Analysis

This study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using Smart PLS 4.0 to examine the relationship among local food souvenirs (LFS), image of sustainable tourism village (ISTV) and tourist loyalty (TL). PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for prediction-oriented research, the inclusion of a mediating construct and its robustness in handling complex models without strict distributional assumptions, rather than sample size consideration alone.

All constructs in the model were specified as reflective, as the indicators were assumed to be manifestations of their respective latent variables. The structural model comprised the following inner-model paths, enabling the assessment of both direct and indirect effects. The analysis followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (values >0.70). Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loading (>0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE >0.50). Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with values below the recommended threshold indicating satisfactory construct distinctiveness.

Second, the structural model was assessed by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2) for explanatory power and predictive relevance (Q^2) using blindfolding. Multicollinearity was evaluated using variance inflation factor (VIF) values (<5). Hypotheses testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples and two-tailed significance testing (Hair et al., 2022; Hair, Risher, et al., 2019; Maydeu-Olivares & García-Forero, 2010; Yamin, 2023).

The mediating effect of ISTV was tested using indirect effect analysis, with mediation considered significant when the bootstrapped confidence interval did not include zero. The results indicated that ISTV partially mediates the relationship between LFS and TL, consistent with temporary mediation reporting standard in PLS-SEM. Common method bias was addressed through procedural remedies in questionnaire design and assessed statistically using full collinearity VIF values, which were below the recommended threshold. Overall, PLS-SEM provided a rigorous and appropriate analytical approach for validating both the measurement and structural models in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondents' Characteristics

Based on the demographic data collected, a total 248 respondents initially completed the online questionnaire. After applying the screening criterion (having previously visited a tourism village), 226 valid responses were retained for final analysis. Among these respondents, the majority were women (66.9%) and predominantly aged between 20-30 years (29%) followed by those aged 31-40 years (24.2%).

In terms of education, most respondents had completed senior high school (43%), while a substantial proportion held a master's or doctoral degree (25.8%). Regarding occupation, students constituted the largest group (45%) followed by private sector employees (20%) and civil servants or government employees (17%). Concerning monthly income, 35% respondents reported earning less than IDR 1,000,000 reflecting the high proportion of students in the sample, while 25% earned between IDR 1,000,000 and IDR 3,000,000.

Table 2. Respondents' Characteristics

Category	Profile	Total (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	<20	55	22.2
	20-30	72	29
	31-40	60	24.2
	41-50	35	14.1
	>50	26	10.5
Gender	Men	82	33.1
	Women	166	66.9
Education	Senior High School	106	43
	Diploma	40	16
	Bachelor	38	15.2
	Master/Doctor	64	25.8
Occupation	Student	112	45
	Private Employee	50	20
	Civil Servant/Government Employee	42	17
	Self Employed	25	10
	Others	19	8
Salary per month	>IDR 1,000,000	87	35
	IDR 1,000,000-IDR 3,000,000	62	25
	IDR 3,000,001-IDR 6,000,000	50	20
	IDR 6,000,001-IDR 10,000,000	30	12
	>IDR 10,000,001	19	8
Ever visited a tourism village	Yes	226	91.1
	No	22	8.9

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Reflective Measurement Model Evaluation

The validity of PLS-SEM measurement can be assessed using two key metrics which are Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Outer (indicator) Loadings. Outer loading represents how strongly each observed indicator is associated with its underlying latent variable. Indicators are

considered valid when their loading values >0.70 (Hair, Black, et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). As shown at Table 3, all indicators had outer loadings exceeding 0.70, with values ranging from 0.730-0.891. These results indicate a strong indicator reliability and support convergent validity, as each indicator strongly represents its latent construct.

Table 3. Outer Loading

Variables	Measurement Items	Indicators	Outer Loading
Local Food Souvenir (LFS)	LFS 1	The presence of local ingredients is important in my decision to purchase food souvenirs	0,755
	LFS 2	The taste of food souvenirs is unique and distinctive	0,780
	LFS 3	The taste of food souvenirs reminds me of my experience in the tourism village	0,730
	LFS 4	The packaging of food souvenirs is attractive	0,775
	LFS 5	The packaging reflects the identity of the tourism village	0,801
	LFS 6	The packaging clearly states the ingredients and origin of the product	0,847
Image of Sustainable Tourism Village (ISTV)	ISTV 1	Tourism villages implement environmentally friendly practices	0,820
	ISTV 2	The food souvenirs are produced sustainably without harming the environment	0,854
	ISTV 3	The food souvenirs promote local natural resources responsibly	0,891
	ISTV 4	The food souvenirs made from local ingredients reflect the unique culture of the tourism village	0,865
	ISTV 5	The production of food souvenirs supports the local community	0,778
	ISTV 6	The local community is actively involved in producing and promoting the food souvenirs	0,822
Tourist Loyalty	TL 1	I am considering visiting the tourism village more than once	0,738
	TL 2	I will recommend the tourism village I have visited	0,835
	TL 3	I am willing to share my experience about the tourism village on social media	0,857
	TL 4	I will post a positive review of the tourism village I have visited on online platforms	0,823

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability measures to assess the internal consistency reliability of a construct-how well a set of indicators measures a single latent variable. Meanwhile, AVE provides a summary measure of the amount of variance captured by a latent construct from its indicators relative to measurement error. Furthermore, AVE value >0.50 or higher indicates that the constructs explain at least 50% of the variance in its indicators, which is

considered acceptable for establishing convergent validity. Together, high loading value, acceptable Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, and adequate AVE scores confirm that the indicators reliably and validly represent the latent variables in the model. Moreover, Table 4 indicates the satisfactory reliability where all of the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability exceeded 0.70 and AVE values surpass 0.50 cut-off, thus confirming convergent validity (Hair, Risher, et al., 2019; Yamin, 2023).

Table 4. Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Local Food Souvenir	0.873	0.904	0.612
Image of Sustainable Tourism Village	0.916	0.935	0.705
Tourist Loyalty	0.830	0.887	0.663

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Furthermore, discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As shown in Tabel 4, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the

constructs. In particular, the HTMT value between local food souvenirs (LFS) and the image of sustainable tourism village (ISTV) was 0.819, confirming that the two conceptually related constructs remain empirically distinct.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	ISTV	LFS	TL
ISTV			
LFS	0.819		
TL	0.618	0.708	

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Structural Model Evaluation

To evaluate the inner (structural) model, the study examined collinearity, predictive accuracy and the significance of hypothesized relationship. Collinearity statistics, shown in Table 6, report

inner values below the critical threshold of 6, with maximum of 2.185. This indicates the absence of multicollinearity among predictor constructs and supports the stability of the path model (Hair et al., 2022; Yamin, 2023).

Table 6. Inner VIF

Variables	Image of Sustainable Tourism Village	Local Food Souvenir	Tourist Loyalty
Image of Sustainable Tourism Village			2.185
Local Food Souvenir	1		2.185
Tourist Loyalty			

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

The next step involved hypothesis testing by examining path coefficients, t-statistics and p-values. A Relationship is considered significant when the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 or the p-value is below 0.05. The results are reported together with 95% confidence intervals to indicate the precision of the estimated path coefficients. In addition, effect sizes (f^2) were calculated to assess the substantive impact of the hypothesized direct relationships at the structural model level, with values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicating small, moderate and large effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2021; Yamin, 2023). Beyond direct effects, the mediation effect of the image of a sustainable tourism village was assessed through the specific

indirect effect. The strength of the mediation was evaluated using the upsilon v statistic, obtained by squaring the indirect path coefficient. Values of 0.02, 0.075 and 0.175 indicate low, moderate and strong mediation effects (Yamin, 2023). This approach allows the mediating role of the image of a sustainable tourism village to be evaluated in line with the study's research objectives, without repositioning it as an independent predictor. In accordance with contemporary PLS-SEM guidelines, the evaluation of the structural model focused on explained variance (R^2), effect sizes (f^2) and the significance of hypothesized relationships.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	p-value	95% Confidence Interval		f square
			Bottom Limit	Upper Limit	
Direct Effect					
H1 Local Food Souvenir - Image of Sustainable Tourism Village	0.735	0.000	0.665	0.801	1.185
H2 Local Food Souvenir - Tourist Loyalty	0.211	0.005	0.064	0.357	0.153
Specific Indirect Effect (Mediation)					Upsilon v
H3 Local Food Souvenir - Image of Sustainable Tourism Village - Tourist Loyalty	0.141	0.036	0.007	0.269	0.314

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Based on the hypothesis testing results, the following finding were obtained:

1. H1 is accepted, indicating that there is a significant influence of local food souvenirs on the image of a

sustainable tourism village, the path coefficient is 0.735 and p-value 0.000 (<0.05). This implies that any increase in local food souvenirs will enhance the image of a sustainable tourism village. At a 95% confidence interval, the effect size of local food souvenirs in strengthening the image of a sustainable tourism village range between 0.665 and 0.801. Furthermore, the presence of local food souvenirs demonstrates a strong effect at the structural level, with an f square of 1.185. This indicates that the availability of such souvenirs is highly important, and their presence could elevate the image of a sustainable tourism village up to a maximum estimated impact of 0.801.

2. H2 is accepted, showing a significant influence of local food souvenirs on tourist loyalty, the path coefficient is 0.211 and p-value 0.005 (<0.05). This suggests that the availability of local food souvenirs can also increase tourist loyalty. Within a 95% confidence interval, the estimated effect lies between 0.064 and 0.357. Although the impact is statistically significant, the strength of this relationship at the structural level is categorized as moderate, with f square value of 0.153.

This underscores the importance of initiatives aimed at producing and developing strategies related with local food souvenirs, as such efforts can potentially raise tourist loyalty levels by up to 0.357.

3. H3 is accepted, confirming that the image of a sustainable tourism village plays a significant mediating role in the indirect effect of local food souvenirs on tourist loyalty. The mediation path coefficient is 0.141 with p-value 0.036 (<0.05). Moreover, at the structural level, the mediation effect is considered strong, as indicated by an upsilon v value of 0.314. This finding highlights the critical role of the image of a sustainable tourism village as a mediating variable that controls and strengthens the relationship between local food souvenirs and tourist loyalty. Thus, the mediating variable significantly contributes to the overall model structure adopted in this study.

Furthermore, as shown in table 8 below, the model explain explains a moderate proportion of variance in both the image of sustainable tourism village ($R^2=0.542$) and tourist loyalty ($R^2=0.390$) indicating adequate explanatory power for the study context.

Table 8. Goodness of Fit Evaluation

Variables	AVE	R-square
Local Food Souvenir	0.612	
Image of Sustainable Tourism Village	0.705	0.542
Tourist Loyalty	0.663	0.390
Mean	0.660	0.466

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Discussion

Local Food Souvenirs and The Image of Sustainable Tourism Village

The empirical findings support Hypothesis 1, indicating that local food souvenirs play a critical role in enhancing the image of sustainable tourism villages. Specifically, the indicators with the highest contributions-LFS6 ("The packaging clearly states the ingredients and origin of the product") and LFS5 ("The packaging reflects the identity of the tourism village")-exhibited strong outer loading values, indicating that these items reliably represent the local food souvenirs construct, underscoring the importance of transparent labelling and identity-based packaging. It should be noted, however, that high outer loadings reflect the strength of the relationship between indicators and their latent construct, rather than the relative importance of these attributes from the respondents' perspective. These features suggest that tourists value clarity, locality and authenticity in product presentation, emphasizing cognitive and informational dimensions over purely sensory experiences.

Moreover, the lowest scoring indicator, LFS3, related to the nostalgic and emotional dimension of taste, received comparatively less emphasis. This finding indicates a weaker alignment of the emotional taste dimension with the overall construct in this sample, rather than a definitive lower importance of taste-related attributes. This indicates a shift in consumer priorities, where modern tourists-especially younger ones-are more responsive to products that explicitly convey ethical sourcing and place identity. Such trends are validated by the demographic characteristics of this study where the majority of respondents were under 30 years old, with a large portion comprising students (45%) and individuals with senior high school or higher education backgrounds. Their preference for transparency and ethical alignment is consistent with broader consumer patterns found among environmentally and culturally conscious travelers.

This relationship between food souvenir design and sustainable image is further reinforced when viewed alongside the ISTV indicators, particularly ISTV3 who had the highest loading followed by ISTV4 and ISTV2. These indicators reveal that tourists strongly associate the responsible promotion of local natural resources, sustainable production and cultural reflection in food souvenirs with a positive destination image. The high factor loadings indicate that when local food products visibly support environmental stewardship and communicate unique cultural identity, they not only elevate the perception of authenticity, but also enhance the broader image of sustainability.

This cognitive prioritization aligns with Suhartanto et al. (2018), who argue that food souvenirs perceived as authentic symbolically meaningful enhance the overall destination image. Furthermore, Pizzichini et al. (2020) emphasize that origin-specific and ethically framed branding play a pivotal role in building tourist trust, especially when communicated through packaging. These perspectives confirm that local food is no longer evaluated solely for its taste but is increasingly seen as a conduit for conveying destination values. Similarly, Zakiah, et al. (2023) found that tourists with a high regard for sustainability are more likely to appreciate and respond positively to clearly branded products that reflect environmental and cultural responsibility. Yang et al. (2022) further elaborate on the concept of foodscapes, noting that tourists perceive and assess destinations through multi-sensory cues-visual, informational and emotional- that are embedded in food and its presentation. The indicators LFS6 and LFS5 effectively align with this framework, reinforcing the symbolic function of local food souvenirs in destination branding.

Guan et al. (2019) add depth to this argument by introducing the concept of food heritagization, where traditional culinary elements are deliberately positioned as cultural heritage. This process not only

adds symbolic value to the product but also enhances the tourism village's image as a steward of local identity and sustainability. Moreover, Mohammad et al. (2022) echo this by demonstrating how destination image is closely tied to the integration of local food narratives in tourism offerings. When food souvenirs are framed as expressions of tradition and ecological mindfulness, they serve as tools for both cultural preservation and strategic promotion.

In summary, the data reveals that local food souvenirs contribute significantly to the image of sustainable tourism villages through their ability to communicate locality, transparency and cultural significance. For a predominantly young, female and educated demographic-as represented in this study-these elements are especially influential. To strengthen their positioning, tourism villages should focus on the communicative function of local food souvenirs, ensuring that their ethical and cultural narratives are clearly embedded in both design and delivery. This strategy will not only meet the expectations of contemporary tourists but also reinforce the long-term sustainability image of the destination.

Local Food Souvenirs and Tourist Loyalty

Hypothesis 2 was supported by the findings, indicating that local food souvenirs significantly influence tourist loyalty, tourists who perceive food souvenirs as authentic, culturally meaningful and aligned with sustainability values are more likely to revisit a tourism village and promote it through digital and social channels. Although the direct effect is moderate, its statistical strength emphasizes the strategic potential of food souvenirs in fostering loyalty. Suhartanto et al. (2018) argue that authenticity and symbolic meaning are crucial to loyalty formation, a claim reflected in this study's results.

Among the local food souvenir indicators LFS6 had the highest loading followed by LFS5. These scores confirm that transparency and cultural representation are

key aspects driving tourists' favorable responses. The high contribution of packaging-related indicators aligns with findings from Pizzichini et al. (2020) and Zakiah et al. (2023), who noted that tourists increasingly respond to ethical branding and clear origin narratives when evaluating destination products. On the other hand, LFS3 suggests that while sensory memory matters, it is secondary to transparent communication and visual identity.

Furthermore, in terms of tourist loyalty indicators, TL3 and TL2 have the strongest loading while TL1 has the lowest. This finding illustrates a key behavioral shift among the younger, digitally literate respondents in this study. With 66.9% of participants being female, 51.2% under the age of 30 and 45% being students, it is evident that this cohort is highly engaged in online platforms and more likely to express loyalty through social advocacy rather than repeat visitation alone. The relevance of digital expression of loyalty is further supported by Ismarizal & Kusumah (2023) who explored "The Instagram Effect" on destination choice. Their findings suggest that social media aesthetic, authenticity and user-generated content significantly influence tourists' perceptions and behaviors. For the younger demographic in this study, visually appealing and ethically framed food souvenirs are not only consumed but also shared as part of their personal identity and digital storytelling. Thus, food souvenirs act as social assets-objects that are both personally meaningful and publicly promotable-which deepens loyalty and increases organic reach through visual platforms.

This demographic's prioritization of sustainability, transparency and digital storytelling-values clearing encoded in the most influential indicators-confirms the growing importance of narrative-rich, ethically produced food souvenirs. Guan et al. (2019) emphasize that food heritagization enhances destination attachment, particularly when food is presented as a carrier of place-based identity and ecological

responsibility. This framework supports the observed trend in this study that loyalty is shaped not by consumption alone, but by the meaning tourists derive from that consumption.

Therefore, the direct relationship between local food souvenirs and tourist loyalty is shaped primarily by how well souvenirs communicate origin, authenticity and cultural narrative. For younger, educated and digitally active tourists, loyalty often manifests in non-traditional forms such as online reviews, social sharing and personal advocacy. To leverage this trend, tourism villages should focus on product transparency, strong visual identity and digital storytelling in their food souvenirs strategies-positioning these products not just as mementos but as meaningful extensions of the destination's sustainable and cultural ethos.

Mediating Role of Image of Sustainable Tourism Village

Hypothesis 3 is supported by the findings, demonstrating that the image of a sustainable tourism village mediates the relationship between local food souvenirs and tourist loyalty. This indicates that food souvenirs do not only influence tourist loyalty directly but also shape tourists' perception of the village which in turn enhance their loyalty. This mediating mechanism reflects the dual role of food souvenirs-as tangible memoir and as symbolic representations of destination identity and values. According to Gursoy et al. (2014), a strong destination image enhances both affective and behavioral loyalty by shaping tourists' cognitive and emotional evaluations.

The mediation is strongly supported by the data, particularly the high loadings on indicators such as ISTV3, which reflects how food souvenirs promote local natural resources responsibly and ISTV4 indicating that they reflect the unique culture of the tourism village. ISTV2, emphasizing sustainable production, further reinforces the perception that these products communicate environmental and ethical commitments. When these values are clearly

expressed, tourists are more likely to view the destination positively, which in turn leads to increased loyalty-especially among visitors who resonate with sustainability narratives, as emphasized by Zakiah et al. (2023) and Pizzichini et al. (2020). The relationship is further strengthened when considered alongside the local food souvenir indicators with the highest contributions being LFS6 and LFS5. These indicators emphasize transparency and identity representation, both of which contribute to constructing a coherent and ethical destination image. Guan et al. (2019) describe this process as food heritagization, where food products evolve into carriers of local identity and tradition. Such transformation amplifies the symbolic role of food souvenirs in building trust, perceived authenticity and cultural resonance-all of which are essential in influencing how tourists perceive the destination and their willingness to revisit or recommend it.

The influence of destination image on loyalty is also evident in the strength of loyalty-related indicators, particularly TL3 and TL2. These findings align with Yang et al. (2022) who noted that image-driven trust and emotional connection are key to tourist advocacy and post-visit behavior. Mohammad et al. (2022) similarly found that destination image, shaped by sustainable food experiences, leads to stronger engagement and revisit intention. The relatively lower loading from TL1 suggests that while behavioral loyalty is present, image more strongly influences attitudinal and social loyalty, particularly among digitally active visitors.

Hence, the mediating role in the image of sustainable tourism villages reinforces the idea that loyalty is not formed solely through product satisfaction but through a multi-layered perception of the destination's values. When local food souvenirs successfully convey environmental stewardship, cultural authenticity and community engagement-as reflected in both LFS and ISTV indicators-they elevate the overall image of the destination. This

enriched perception fosters loyalty not only through repeat visits, but more significantly through digital advocacy and value-driven alignment, particularly among young, socially and environmentally conscious tourists.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have several practical implications for tourism practitioners, especially destination managers and local producers, particularly in relation to the development and management of local food souvenirs. First, destinations' managers should prioritize creating food souvenirs that emphasize local ingredients, community-based production and cultural storytelling. These attributes not only build a positive image of the sustainable tourism village but also directly enhance tourist loyalty. Clear packaging that highlights the origin, ingredients and cultural relevance of the product is crucial for establishing authenticity and trust. Second, initiatives should integrate local communities in the production and promotion process to reinforce sustainability and cultural value. By promoting transparency and ethical production, tourism stakeholders can position food souvenirs as both economic tools and cultural symbols that resonate to tourists' desire for meaningful and sustainable experiences. Interactive activities like culinary workshops and guided tastings should be incorporated into tourism programs to deepen visitor's engagement and reinforce the narrative behind the product.

This study concludes that local food souvenirs significantly enhance the image of a sustainable tourism village and directly contribute to tourist loyalty, both independently and through a strong mediating effect of destination image. The results indicate that local food souvenirs significantly shape tourists' perception of sustainability, particularly when they transparently highlight cultural identity and environmental responsibility, both as the attributes that are most appreciated by the study's

predominantly young, educated and digitally engaged respondents. These souvenirs contribute not only to the direct strengthening of tourist loyalty but also exert an even stronger influence when they reinforce the destination's sustainable image. While support for the local community is acknowledged, it has a relatively lower impact, indicating a need for better communication of local economic benefits. Ultimately, the study affirms that local food souvenirs serve as both tangible products and symbolic representations of ethical, environmental and cultural values, making them powerful tools for sustainable destination branding and long-term tourist engagement.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling approach, which may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the sampled respondents. In addition, the respondent profile was dominated by young participants and students, which may influence perceptions of local food souvenirs and sustainability-related attributes. The cross-sectional research design captures perceptions at a single point in time and does not allow for observation of changes in tourist behavior over time. Finally, the empirical context was limited to tourism villages in West Java and Central Java, and therefore the findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to tourism villages in other regions or different cultural settings.

This research contributes to the theoretical discourse on sustainable tourism by empirically demonstrating the role of local food souvenirs in enhancing both the destination image and tourist loyalty. It provides evidence that food souvenirs are not merely peripheral products but also an integral element in the branding and loyalty-building process of sustainable tourism destinations. Furthermore, by validating the mediating role of destination image using γ and confirming the dual pathway of local food souvenir influence—both direct and

mediated-this study supports and extends destination loyalty models such those proposed by Gursoy et al. (2014). Moreover, the findings offer new insights into how authenticity, origin transparency and cultural symbolism embedded in food souvenirs shape tourist behavior aligning with the argument of Yang et al. (2022) and Pizzichini et al. (2020).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to the Hospitality Department and Politeknik Pariwisata NHI Bandung for their continuous support, guidance and academic resources throughout the completion of this research. We hope this study contributes meaningfully to the development of sustainable tourism practices and supports the promotion of local-food based souvenirs as a strategic tool for enhancing village tourism and community well-being.

AI USE STATEMENT

The authors acknowledge that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited and supportive manner during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with English language editing, improving clarity and academic expression. AI tools were not used for data analysis, hypothesis testing, interpretation of results or figure generation. All conceptual development, methodological decisions, data analysis, interpretation and conclusion were conducted by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and originality of the manuscript.

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