Beyond Consumption: Exploring Sensory, Symbolic, and Digital Influences in Gastronomic Tourist Behaviour (Evidence from Indonesia)

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Abstract

This study develops and empirically tests an integrative model of gastronomic tourist behaviour by connecting symbolic, sensorial, digital, and emotional dimensions of travel experience. Data from Indonesian domestic tourists (n = 384) were collected through structured surveys and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Results reveal that embodied gastronomic encounters—particularly haptic interaction with food and place—are the strongest predictors of emotional attachment, tourist loyalty, and destination advocacy. Place branding further amplifies this effect, while social media stimulation contributes meaningfully but only in support of direct sensory experience. In contrast, digital engagement and cultural immersion exert marginal influence, suggesting that virtual promotion or heritage framing alone cannot sustain culinary tourism. Theoretically, these findings sharpen debates on experiential consumption by demonstrating that bodily immediacy and affective resonance mediate the impact of symbolic or digital triggers on behavioural outcomes. This challenges cognitive and representational accounts that overstate narrative or mediated experiences in shaping loyalty. Practically, the study calls for gastronomic destinations to design strategies that privilege multisensory engagement—taste, texture, and atmosphere—while embedding them in emotionally charged storytelling. By foregrounding the primacy of embodied experience, this research reframes culinary tourism not as a matter of digital visibility or cultural rhetoric, but as a sensorially grounded pathway to durable advocacy in an experience-driven travel economy.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism; concrete experience; emotional attachment; social media; destination advocacy; domestic tourists

INTRODUCTION

Background

In recent years, gastronomic tourism has evolved from a niche interest into a dynamic medium through which travellers seek not only to eat but to feel, learn, and belong. At its most compelling, it transcends consumption, functioning as a portal into local identity, heritage, and cultural storytelling (Pivarski et al., 2024; Sujood et al., 2023). Meals, once fleeting acts of sustenance, are now orchestrated experiences imbued with place-based meaning, where the flavours of a destination echo its history and values (Čaušević & Fusté-Forné, 2022). The sensorial intimacy of tasting, the ritual of preparation, and the sociability of sharing meals are among the many pathways through which tourists form emotional bonds, build memories, and ultimately shape attachment to place (Li & Yang, 2023; Morón-Corujeira & Fusté-Forné, 2022). In tandem, such culinary engagement supports cultural preservation and local economies, offering a sustainable tourism model rooted in community-based authenticity (Atoche-Silva et al., 2024; Sujood et al., 2023).

This cultural immersion is increasingly entangled with digital influence. The rise of Social Media Induced Tourism (SMIT) has reconfigured the way travellers envision and pursue gastronomic experiences, as platforms like Instagram and Tik-Tok elevate specific food moments into shareable aspirations (Hastiningsih & Sari, 2023; Zvirbule et al., 2023). Tourists do not arrive tabula rasa; they come equipped with expectations shaped by curated content and algorithmic aesthetics—seeking to reenact the digital stories they have consumed. However, the degree to which online anticipation maps onto in-situ sensation remains uncertain. Disparities between projected and lived experience can produce either enhanced authenticity or emotional dissonance, a tension yet to be fully unpacked in the literature (Fakhruddin & Salim, 2023; Solano-Sánchez et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

Beneath the allure of screens and storytelling lies the physical act of encounter—what has been termed haptic tourism: the direct, embodied contact with place through smell, touch, and taste (Kolb, 2015; Yiannakou et al., 2022). These interactions foster sensorial stimulation and affective depth, anchoring experiences in personal and cultural memory. Destinations, aware of this potential, increasingly embed culinary narratives within broader place branding strategies. They aim to craft emotionally resonant identities through symbols, rituals, and foodscapes (Chen et al., 2022; Girard, 2024). However, how multisensory experiences integrate into brand perception and behavioural loyalty remains underexplored (Alam, 2024; Yu & Na, 2022), particularly compared to traditional cognitive or satisfaction-based predictors.

Moreover, a growing body of work highlights the importance of digital engagement—how tourists interact with destination content across pre-visit anticipation, on-site documentation, and post-visit reflection (Deb & Mallik, 2023; Silaban et al., 2023). This ongoing engagement reinforces memory and helps shape the experience's meaning (Dawson et al., 2023; Zheng, 2023). When combined with cultural immersion—participation in everyday culinary practices—tourists become co-creators of local and digital narratives, extending the experiential arc into the social sphere (Abdillah et al., 2025; Purnomo, 2023; Supriyadi et al., 2024). However, these two constructs remain largely isolated in tourism models despite their convergence in practice.

Finally, while satisfaction and perceived value have long been positioned as pillars of tourist loyalty, the affective architecture of emotional attachment offers deeper explanatory power. Emotional attachment—an enduring, sentiment-laden connection between individual and place—acts as a conduit through which

experiences crystallize into behavioural outcomes such as loyalty and voluntary advocacy (Hasan, 2023; Lever et al., 2022; Ullah et al., 2022; Maulana Rachmandani et al., 2025). Surprisingly, few conceptual frameworks weave together the full tapestry of symbolic, sensorial, digital, and cultural antecedents that may lead to such attachment and its behavioural manifestations.

However, despite growing attention to the experiential dimensions of gastronomic tourism, current research tends to examine symbolic, digital, or sensory influences in isolation. Few studies offer an integrative framework that captures how these diverse antecedents—haptic tourism and social media to place branding and cultural immersion—interact to shape concrete experiences, emotional bonds, and behavioural outcomes such as loyalty and advocacy. Additionally, the mediating role of embodied gastronomic experience in this process remains underexplored, particularly within emerging tourism markets like Indonesia. To address this gap, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do symbolic (e.g., place branding), digital (e.g., social media, digital engagement), and cultural (e.g., immersion) factors shape tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences?; (2) What is the role of concrete experience in fostering emotional attachment, tourist loyalty, and destination advocacy?; and (3) To what extent does emotional attachment mediate the relationship between concrete experience and behavioural outcomes?

Research Objectives

This study seeks to address the research gap. It proposes and empirically tests a multidimensional model that integrates Social Media-Induced Tourism, Haptic Tourism, Place Branding, Digital Engagement, and Cultural Immersion as antecedents to Concrete Experience, which fosters Emotional Attachment, Tourist Loyalty, and Destination Advocacy. By doing so, the study contributes a holistic

framework for understanding how gastronomic tourists construct meaning, form bonds, and become ambassadors of place in both physical and digital worlds.

All constructs in this study, including the antecedents, are modeled reflectively. This decision reflects the conceptualization that each construct represents a latent psychological tendency inferred through observable indicators rather than being defined by them. For instance, haptic tourism is reflected through tourists' multisensory experiences (touch, taste, smell), and place branding is captured via perceptions of culinary identity and promotional resonance—both of which can vary without altering the essence of the underlying construct. Although constructs such as place branding and haptic tourism might appear formative due to their multidimensional nature, they are treated reflectively in line with prior empirical modeling in tourism literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media-Induced Tourism and Concrete Experience

Social Media-Induced Tourism (SMIT) reflects a paradigmatic shift in the way travellers engage with and anticipate tourism experiences—one that is especially pronounced in gastronomic contexts. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have reconfigured the consumption of place into a highly visual, narrative-driven practice, where the aesthetics of food, atmosphere, and local rituals are curated through user-generated content (Widjanarko et al., 2024; Zvirbule et al., 2023). In this landscape, destinations acquire symbolic appeal before they are physically encountered, and travelers arrive with scripts—often inspired by influencers, travel vlogs, or viral culinary content—that guide what they seek to experience.

This pre-mediated engagement with food destinations does more than merely generate interest; it constructs a sensory

expectation. Deb & Mallik (2023) argue that digital exposure primes tourists' perceptual sensitivity and orients them toward particular embodied interactions—flavours to taste, markets to explore, dishes to capture and share. In theory, this enhances their readiness to engage meaningfully with local gastronomy. However, this same mechanism harbours a potential contradiction. As others have noted, idealized and stylized representations may cultivate expectations that reality cannot fulfil (Fakhruddin & Salim, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). The emotional dissonance between curated media and lived experience could detract from the authenticity or satisfaction of the visit (Alzaydi & Elsharnouby, 2023), thus complicating assumptions about the positive role of social media in shaping tourist experiences.

Empirical attention to this tension remains limited. While SMIT is widely acknowledged for its influence on destination selection, less is known about how it shapes the quality and texture of on-site engagement—particularly in culinary tourism, where taste, tactility, and social ambience are central. The gap lies not in understanding what social media promotes but in clarifying how those promotions materialize into concrete, sensory-rich experiences once the tourist arrives. Addressing this will offer a more nuanced perspective on digitally mediated tourism's psychological and phenomenological implications (Li et al., 2022). In short, social media-induced tourism primes tourists to engage in certain sensory and emotional experiences, acting as a symbolic and anticipatory framework. Shaping attention and desire before the visit increases the likelihood that tourists will actively seek and recognize concrete gastronomic interactions that align with their expectations.

H1: Social Media-Induced Tourism positively influences tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences.

Haptic Tourism and Concrete Experience

In gastronomic tourism, haptic tourism emerges as a pivotal conduit for a deep, embodied experience that moves beyond passive consumption into active, sensory engagement territory. Defined by tourists' tactile interactions with a destination—such as tasting, touching, cooking, and smelling—haptic tourism aligns strongly with Experiential Learning Theory, in which concrete experience forms the basis for reflective and affective understanding (Kolb, 2015). Through the manipulation of ingredients, the experience of texture, and the immersion in aromatic environments, travellers not only encounter food but learn it, feel it, and often remember it more vividly (Guo & Tang, 2022; Yiannakou et al., 2022).

These multisensory touchpoints are essential for forming authentic and emotionally resonant experiences. Rather than observing from the periphery, tourists are invited into the core of local foodways, where participation in markets, kitchens, and communal tables builds cognitive insight and affective bonding. Studies suggest that such encounters deepen place attachment and cultural understanding while stimulating a more enduring form of memory formation (Aksenova et al., 2022; Wijaya et al., 2023; Zvirbule et al., 2023). However, despite its importance, haptic engagement is often marginalized in tourism promotion, emphasizing visual aesthetics and neglecting culinary travel's more embodied, less "photogenic" dimensions (Nesterchuk, 2022; Pérez et al., 2024).

This overreliance on visual marketing may inadvertently dilute the richness of gastronomic tourism, flattening what should be a multisensory journey into a mere spectacle. As Na et al. (2024) argue, the absence of tactile and olfactory elements in tourism narratives limits experiential depth and affects how authenticity is constructed and perceived. Meanwhile, empirical investigation into the emotional

and behavioural impact of haptic experiences remains limited. Although preliminary findings suggest that tactile and olfactory engagement significantly enhance affective connection and satisfaction (Aksenova et al., 2022; Ilić et al., 2022), the mechanisms linking these interactions to concrete tourist experiences are still under-theorized and under-tested. Given the transformative potential of haptic encounters in shaping perception, memory, and emotion, there is a growing need to recognize haptic tourism as a core experiential domain, not a peripheral enhancement. By doing so, destinations can design more immersive, meaningful, and culturally embedded gastronomic experiences that resonate with tourists on multiple sensory and emotional levels (Atoche-Silva et al., 2024). In sum, physical, sensory-rich interactions—touching, tasting, cooking—create vivid, embodied memories that are difficult to replicate through visual or narrative means alone. Haptic tourism brings tourists into direct contact with local culture, allowing them to live the experience through their senses and embed it deeply in memory.

H2: Haptic Tourism positively influences tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences.

Place Branding and Concrete Experience

In culinary tourism, branding is no longer confined to visual logos or slogans—it extends into the textures of food, the rituals surrounding its preparation, and the stories locals tell about it. In this domain, place branding is fundamentally narrative and symbolic: it draws upon culinary heritage, regional identity, and cultural memory to offer visitors a sense of what the place means (Girard, 2024; Prawira et al., 2023). When done well, such branding does more than attract interest—it shapes expectations and subtly scripts the experience long before the first bite is taken. However, there is an important question: How much of the experience is lived, and how much is pre-shaped by branding? (Yu & Na, 2022) suggest that branding operates as a lens—a semantic frame—that colours how tourists interpret sensory encounters. A market visit or a street food tasting may feel "authentic" not just because of the food itself but because it fits neatly within the story the destination has told about itself. In this sense, branding is not only an antecedent to experience—it co-creates it (Alam, 2024; Xu et al., 2023).

Despite this, the experiential dimension of place branding is often treated as secondary. Much of the literature focuses on awareness, image, and destination choice. Rarely is the embodied impact of branding considered—how it feels once tourists are amid a place's smells, tastes, and sounds. As Gozali & Wijoyo (2022) note, branding narratives increasingly aim to align with tourist preferences, but how those narratives play out in real-time—as an effect, as a sensation—is still poorly understood. This omission is not trivial. A mismatch between branded narrative and lived experience can produce dissonance, especially in tourism forms like gastronomy, where sensation and memory are tightly interwoven.

If a destination over-promises sophistication but delivers simplicity—or romanticizes authenticity but offers commodification—the impact can be a disappointment and a breakdown in trust (Fakhruddin & Salim, 2023; Ma, 2023). Conversely, when branding is grounded in real, textured, everyday practices, it can amplify the depth of the experience and reinforce emotional bonds. For these reasons, this study views branding as a marketing device and a shaper of concrete experience. It calls for empirical attention to how branding narratives are absorbed, reframed, or even resisted in the moment of gastronomic encounter. Ultimately, branding functions as a symbolic primer—influencing how tourists perceive, interpret, and emotionally engage with sensory realities. When destination narratives resonate with the lived multisensory environment, they

enhance meaning-making and embed the experience more vividly in memory.

H3: Place Branding positively influences tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences.

Digital Engagement and Concrete Experience

The modern travel experience is no longer confined to the physical site—it begins long before departure, often in the curated scroll of a feed. In gastronomic tourism, digital engagement has emerged as an anticipatory force: liking, sharing, commenting, or creating destination-related content becomes part of how tourists imagine, frame, and eventually live their culinary experiences (Deb & Mallik, 2023; Prawira et al., 2025; Susanto, 2023; Zheng, 2023). This process is not merely promotional—it is participatory. Tourists do not just observe; they pre-engage, rehearsing the experiences they intend to seek, often with primed emotional and sensory anticipation (Silaban et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2024). The idea of "digitally pre-living" an experience is powerful and problematic. On the one hand, scholars argue that such interaction deepens emotional readiness, setting the stage for more immersive engagement on-site (Hoang, 2023; Putri & Yulianto, 2022).

On the other hand, the distinction between passive browsing and active co-creation remains a conceptual blind spot. Not all digital behaviour is equally transformative. While active interaction—commenting on a video, saving a culinary map, sharing a food itinerary—may generate meaningful intention, passive scrolling may do little more than entertain (Alencastro et al., 2023; Dawson et al., 2023). Moreover, digital engagement is not neutral. Highly curated imagery and influencer-driven narratives often elevate expectations to an idealized plane, raising the risk of expectation-experience mismatch once tourists are physically present (Chen et al., 2022). This can produce emotional dissonance, especially in food tourism, where sensory authenticity is paramount. The contrast between digital allure and on-ground realism may result in diminished satisfaction if the experience fails to deliver its digital promise.

Despite this, the role of digital engagement in shaping concrete, embodied experiences are rarely examined in depth. Much of the existing research privileges its impact on destination choice or intention, leaving the question of how it informs the felt quality of the visit. This study argues that digital engagement is not ancillary—it is formative. In an era where tourists increasingly construct meaning across physical and virtual spaces, understanding how digital interactions inform the emotional, sensory, and cognitive texture of real-world experiences is critical. It is not simply about what tourists do online; it is about what they bring from that space—and how it shapes what they feel, taste, and remember. Digital engagement primes tourists' minds and emotions before travel, shaping their expectations and interpretive frames. These pre-trip interactions influence the depth, intensity, and meaning of on-site experiences, thus playing a formative role in how concrete gastronomic experiences unfold.

H4: Digital Engagement positively influences tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences.

Cultural Immersion and Concrete Experience

In gastronomic tourism, food is more than flavor—practice, memory, and ritual. In this setting, cultural immersion refers to a tourist's active involvement in the everyday culinary life of a destination: cooking with locals, navigating markets, sharing communal meals, and learning the symbolic language of food preparation. These are activities and acts of entry into a culture, offering a textured understanding of place, tradition, and identity (Rahmi et al., 2023; Supriyadi et al., 2024; Utomo et al., 2025). Through such engagements, tourists relate to food as a consumable

product and a living expression of community.

What distinguishes immersion from mere observation is its embodied quality. Tourists who knead dough, grind spices, or serve food in traditional settings are not just seeing culture—they are doing it. This performative dimension lends depth to the experience, intensifying sensory awareness and reinforcing emotional connection. Song & Kim (2022) note that these interactions foster a sense of "place meaning," where memory, feeling, and understanding converge. However, surprisingly, this embodied layer of cultural participation remains peripheral in most empirical models. Much of the tourism literature discusses authenticity as a static evaluation—something assessed from afar—rather than something felt, co-created, and remembered at the moment (Maleachi et al., 2024; Purnomo, 2023).

The omission is telling. Gastronomy is a multisensory medium, and when tourists engage directly with local practices, the intensity of taste, texture, and smell is often magnified. (Ismanto et al., 2022) observe that such interactions generate stronger affective ties and cognitive appreciation for local heritage. Rather than merely consuming food, tourists become participants in its story—and in doing so, they inscribe the experience more deeply into memory. This study argues that cultural immersion is not a background enhancer but a driver of the experience. By participating in culinary rituals and social practices, tourists anchor their visit in something more enduring than consumption: meaning. These embodied interactions forge emotional bonds and produce more vivid, memorable gastronomic experiences. In summary, cultural immersion heightens the authenticity and intensity of gastronomic experiences by inviting tourists to participate rather than observe. These embodied acts deepen emotional involvement and sensorial engagement, enhancing the vividness of concrete experience.

H5: Cultural Immersion positively influences tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences.

Concrete Experience and Emotional Attachment

The journey from momentary experience to enduring emotional bond often begins with the senses. In tourism, concrete experience refers to direct, multisensory interactions with the place—eating unfamiliar foods, sharing meals with strangers-turned-hosts, or participating in cultural rituals whose meaning unfolds in action rather than explanation. These are not passive moments; they are emotionally laden events that form the first layer of how a place is remembered and—crucially—how it becomes meaningful (Hasan, 2023; Kolb, 1984; Ullah et al., 2022). What gives concrete experience its potency is its effective texture. The warmth of a communal kitchen, the scent of slow-cooked spices, or the tactile rhythm of preparing dough—these moments bypass abstract evaluation and embed themselves in memory. However, most models of tourist loyalty still rely on constructs such as satisfaction or perceived value, treating emotional attachment as a byproduct rather than a product of lived, felt experience (Esau & Senese, 2022; Sabil Hussein et al., 2022). However, emotional attachment is not calculated—it is cultivated through presence, repetition, and resonance.

In this light, Kolb's experiential learning framework is particularly instructive: concrete experience is the foundation upon which reflective and emotional layers are built (Kolb & Kolb, 2022). It is not the memory of the information that matters, but the memory of the involvement. In gastronomic tourism, especially, where culture is ingested both literally and metaphorically, emotional attachment often emerges from the multisensory intimacy of the experience itself—tasting heritage, participating in culinary rituals, and feeling a temporary but meaningful sense of belonging (Guo & Tang, 2022; Yu & Na, 2022).

Still, the experiential underpinnings of attachment remain underexplored. Too often, emotional bonding is examined through static perceptions—how much the tourist "liked" the place—rather than dynamic processes: what did they touch, taste, and co-create? The emotional arc of tourism, particularly in gastronomy, deserves closer scrutiny—not as an afterthought but as an outcome emerging directly from embodied contact with culture. This study contends that emotional attachment is not merely a psychological state but a sensory echo of experience. By foregrounding the role of concrete experience, we may better understand how travellers form affective connections that persist long after departure. In essence, multisensory engagement transforms fleeting moments into emotionally significant ones. When tourists physically and emotionally participate in food culture, they encode those moments with personal meaning—laying the foundation for emotional attachment.

H6: Concrete Experience positively influences Emotional Attachment.

Concrete Experience and Behavioural Outcomes

Tourism literature has long emphasized post-visit outcomes—loyalty, advocacy, and satisfaction—while positioning experience itself as a precursor or input. However, in practice, particularly within gastronomic tourism, the lived, sensorially rich experience lingers longest and often becomes the most decisive factor in future behaviour. According to (Kolb, 1984), experiential learning theory, concrete experience forms the foundation of affective learning—embodied interactions through which travellers come to understand, interpret, and emotionally respond to a place. Concrete experience in culinary travel typically involves immersive activities such as cooking traditional dishes with locals, participating in food rituals, or exploring regional markets. These engagements stimulate multiple senses, evoke emotional salience, and offer deep cultural insight (Yiannakou et al., 2022; Zvirbule et al., 2023). As Morón-Corujeira & Fusté-Forné (2022) argue, these tactile and symbolic encounters are often encoded into long-term memory, motivating return intention and destination advocacy, even without formal satisfaction evaluations.

While emotional attachment remains an important mediating construct, recent scholarship suggests that concrete experience may also directly influence behaviour (Girard, 2024; Wu et al., 2023). The affective power of these firsthand encounters—grounded in novelty, place-based meaning, and cultural resonance—can independently reinforce loyalty and prompt tourists to recommend destinations to others. This is especially true in culinary tourism, where visitors often recall not services or amenities but the flavor of interaction, the texture of memory, and the ritual of participation. Despite growing empirical support, many theoretical models still prioritize abstract constructs such as perceived value or service quality, neglecting the transformative power of the lived experience (Badia et al., 2023; Pérez et al., 2024).

Tourists frequently cite feelings, personal growth, and meaningful exchanges—not satisfaction scores—as reasons for revisiting or advocating for a destination. Recognizing this gap, Xu et al. (2023) and others call for re-centering tourism behaviour models around the experience as an outcome as much as an input. This study argues that concrete gastronomic experiences—immersive, novel, and emotionally resonant—can directly shape post-visit behaviour, bypassing traditional evaluative mediators. When sensory and symbolic meanings converge, as in culinary travel, the experience becomes a persuasive narrative that motivates travellers to return and share their stories with others. By engaging in deeply memorable and culturally grounded experiences, tourists develop loyalty rooted not in service metrics but in sensory and emotional resonance.

H7: Concrete Experience positively influences Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty.

H9: Concrete Experience positively influences Destination Advocacy.

Emotional Attachment, Loyalty, and Advocacy

Emotional attachment represents tourism behaviour's most profound yet often underestimated dynamics. Unlike satisfaction—which tends to be transactional, short-term, and evaluative—attachment is relational. It grows not from service quality alone but from experiences that resonate deeply with one's identity, memories, and sense of place (Aksoy & Yazici, 2023; Lever et al., 2022). In gastronomic tourism, where sensory experiences intertwine with culture and community, this attachment often emerges not from the food per se but from what the food comes to symbolize—belonging, connection, and discovery. Emotional attachment functions as a psychological bridge—transforming sensory engagement into a durable bond that guides future behaviour.

This bond frequently manifests in tourist loyalty: the intention to return, preference for the destination over others, and continued emotional investment in its story. However, unlike traditional loyalty models that emphasize value and satisfaction, this commitment is rooted in emotional memory—tourists return not because the food was "good" but because it made them feel at home, inspired, or changed (Hasan, 2023). When tourists experience a strong emotional bond with a destination, that connection becomes a motivating force for returning. In this sense, loyalty is not driven by calculation but by an internalized sense of attachment and personal meaning.

Beyond loyalty lies another, more expressive behavioural outcome: advocacy. Tourists who feel emotionally connected to a destination often become its ambassadors—not out of obligation or incentive, but from a sense of personal stake.

In this sense, advocacy is more than sharing recommendations; it is identity work. The destination becomes part of how the individual sees, and promoting it becomes a form of self-expression (Acharya et al., 2023; Cuadra et al., 2023). This makes advocacy a higher-order outcome, distinct from loyalty in both motivation and form. Despite this, many tourism behaviour models still collapse advocacy into the satisfaction or revisit intention, ignoring its unique emotional roots. By acknowledging emotional attachment as a precursor to loyalty and advocacy, scholars can better capture the complex affective mechanics driving long-term tourist engagement.

This distinction is particularly critical in gastronomic tourism, where eating is often entangled with heritage, performance, and shared identity. This study proposes that emotional attachment is a linchpin—a felt connection linking lived experience with future behavioural expression. When that connection is strong, tourists are more likely to return, represent, and promote the destination as part of their narrative. Thus, when emotional attachment is strong, tourists do not simply return—they advocate. They narrate, recommend, and integrate the destination into their identity, transforming their experience into social influence.

H8: Emotional Attachment positively influences Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty.

H10: Emotional Attachment positively influences Destination Advocacy.

**Loyalty and Destination Advocacy**

Tourist loyalty has long been regarded as a reliable predictor of destination advocacy, with loyal visitors typically more inclined to revisit, share positive word-of-mouth, and influence others' travel decisions (Aksoy & Yazici, 2023; Sjuhada & Zulfa, 2024). In conventional tourism models, advocacy is conceptualized as a behavioural extension of loyalty—built on satisfaction, trust, and

accumulated familiarity (Reyes & Dael, 2023). It is often assumed that tourists who maintain emotional ties and a preference for a destination will naturally promote it through informal peer recommendation or digital engagement, especially in the age of user-generated content (Mengkebayaer et al., 2022). However, gastronomic tourism introduces complexity to this relationship. Unlike generic leisure travel, food-based travel is multisensory, symbolic, and identity-relevant. Tourists may develop emotional or cultural resonance with a culinary destination that drives advocacy behaviours—such as recommending dishes or praising cultural authenticity—even without a strong intent to revisit (Srivastava et al., 2022). Conversely, repeat visitors may avoid advocacy if the destination no longer aligns with evolving personal values or social narratives (Liu et al., 2022; Mbira, 2024). These deviations suggest that loyalty and advocacy are often linked, but their causal strength and direction may vary contextually.

The literature increasingly points to emotional engagement and brand authenticity as mediating or moderating factors. For example, brand authenticity in culinary settings—whether conveyed through local sourcing, heritage-rich storytelling, or community involvement—can enhance loyalty and the willingness to advocate (Sjuhada & Zulfa, 2024). Similarly, advocacy may be catalyzed by the symbolic meaning of food or by how well a culinary experience resonates with the tourist's identity and social values (Hossain et al., 2022; Le et al., 2023). As such, the assumption of a linear loyalty-to-advocacy pathway must be empirically re-evaluated. With its unique affective depth and sociocultural complexity, gastronomic tourism demands a closer examination of how and when loyalty converts into advocacy. Destinations aiming to cultivate ambassadorial behaviours from repeat visitors must sustain loyalty and ensure that their offerings' emotional and symbolic relevance remains intact over time. In short, loyal tourists often advocate for destinations when their emotional investment is strong and their experiences align with personal or social identity. Loyalty can thus act as a foundation for advocacy—but only when the symbolic and affective dimensions of the visit remain meaningful over time.

H11: Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty positively influences Destination Advocacy
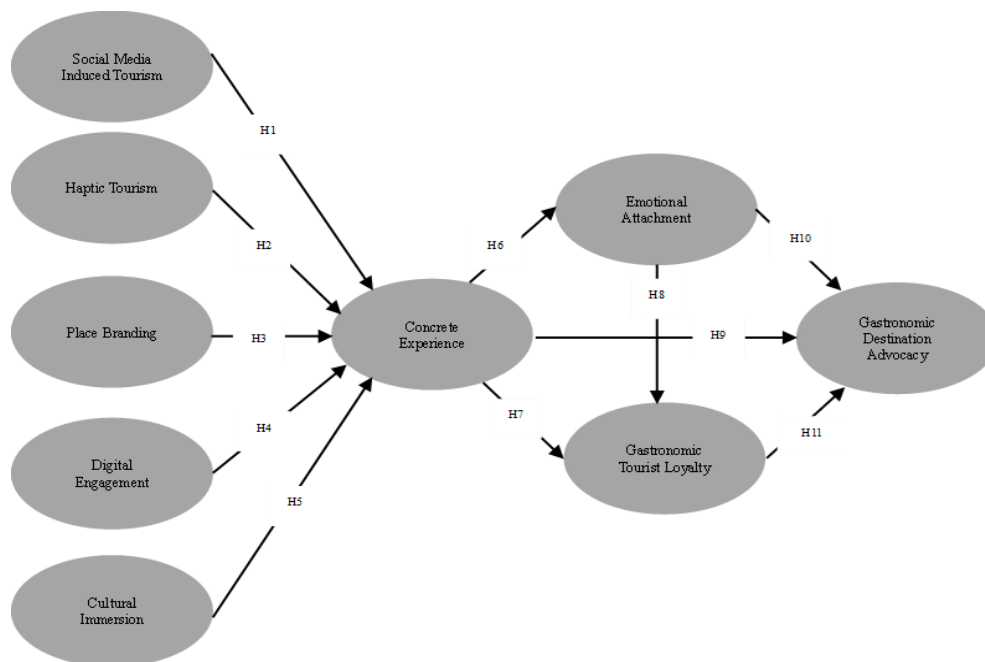
Figure 1. Proposed Model (Source: Research Data, 2025)

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design employing Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the influence of five antecedents—Social Media-Induced Tourism (SMIT), Haptic Tourism, Place Branding, Digital Engagement, and Cultural Immersion—on Concrete Experience, which in turn impacts Emotional Attachment, Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty, and Destination Advocacy. The SEM-PLS approach was selected for its suitability for analyzing complex models with latent variables, its robustness with non-normal data, and its ability to yield stable estimates in studies with medium-sized samples (Hair et al., 2019).

The study targeted Indonesian domestic tourists engaged in culinary tourism within the past 12 months. To ensure participant relevance, four inclusion criteria were applied: 1) aged 18 or older, 2) participation in at least one culinary trip within Indonesia in the past year, 3) ability to identify a culinary destination influenced by social media, cultural heritage, or branding, 4) active digital engagement during travel (e.g., searching, sharing, or creating culinary content). A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was adopted, aligning with SEM-PLS best practices. Based on the rule of ten respondents per indicator (Hair et al., 2019), a minimum sample size of 380 respondents was required, given the final retention of 38 indicators across nine constructs. Data was collected over six weeks (April–May 2025) via an online survey (Google Forms) distributed through culinary travel groups on Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

Ethical clearance was secured from the Department of Business Administration, Politeknik Negeri Bandung. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and preceded by informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected. Participants could withdraw at any point.

All constructs were measured reflectively using indicators adapted from validated prior studies. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Table 1 presents the constructs, retained items, and references.

Table 1. Measurement Indicators

Construct	Number of Retained Indicators	References
Social Media Induced Tourism (SMIT)	3 (SMIT1, SMIT4, SMIT5)	Zvirbule et al. (2023)
Haptic Tourism (HT)	5 (HT1–HT5)	Yiannakou et al. (2022)
Place Branding (PB)	4 (PB1, PB2, PB3, PB5)	Chen et al. (2022)
Digital Engagement (DE)	4 (DE1, DE2, DE4, DE5)	Deb & Mallik (2023); Zheng (2023)
Cultural Immersion (CI)	3 (CI1–CI3)	Supriyadi et al. (2024)
Concrete Experience (CE)	4 (CE1–CE4)	Kolb (2015); Ullah et al. (2022)
Emotional Attachment (EA)	4 (EA1–EA4)	Lever et al. (2022)
Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty (GTL)	5 (GTL1–GTL5)	Hussein et al. (2022)
Destination Advocacy (GDA)	4 (GDA1–GDA4)	Cuadra et al. (2023)

(Source: Research data, 2025)

Only items with standardized factor loadings ≥ 0.7 were retained to ensure high construct reliability and convergent validity levels. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 in a two-stage process: 1) Measurement Model Evaluation: Convergent Validity, Internal Consistency, and Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Secondly, Structural Model Evaluation: Path coefficients, t-statistics (via bootstrapping, 5,000 subsamples), R^2 values, and Q^2 (predictive relevance) were assessed to test hypotheses and evaluate the model's explanatory power.

To assess Common Method Bias (CMB): 1) Harman's Single-Factor Test revealed the first factor accounted for <40% of the total variance, and 2) Full collinearity VIF values were <3.3 across constructs, confirming minimal bias (Kock, 2015). Robustness checks included: Power Analysis (G*Power 3.1): With $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, and 95% power, the required sample was 138—surpassed with 384 valid responses.

Respondents represented a diverse demographic spread across Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. Female respondents made up 56% of the sample. The 20–39 age group dominated, with high educational attainment and varied occupational and income backgrounds.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Data for this study were collected over six weeks between April and May 2025 using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey was disseminated through purposive sampling and targeted outreach on digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook culinary travel groups, and WhatsApp communities frequented by Indonesian food enthusiasts. Respondents were required to confirm that they had participated in at least one culinary trip within Indonesia over the past year and had engaged with digital content—either by seeking out or sharing culinary travel experiences. This ensured that participants had both experiential and digital familiarity with the gastronomic tourism landscape.

Three hundred eighty-four valid responses were collected from various provinces across Indonesia, with high concentrations from Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. The demographic composition reflects a socially and economically diverse group. Female participants represented 56% of the sample, while male participants comprised 44%. Most respondents were within the 20–39 age range, with 36.2% aged 20–29 and 29.4% aged 30–39. A further 24.5% were aged 40–49, while 9.9% were aged 50 or older. Educational attainment was notably high, with 48.7% holding a bachelor's degree, 27.3% holding a diploma, and 12.8% possessing postgraduate or professional qualifications. The remaining 11.2% had completed secondary education.

In terms of occupation, the sample included private-sector employees (34.1%), entrepreneurs (28.1%), civil servants (16.4%), students (10.7%), and professionals such as doctors, educators, and security forces (10.7%). Monthly income was similarly varied, with 41.2% earning between IDR 5.000.000 and IDR 9.999.999 33.3% earning above IDR 10.000.000, and 21.6% earning between IDR 2.000.000 and 4.999.999. Only 3.9% earned below IDR 2.000.000 per month. As for culinary tourism frequency, 41.1% had participated in 2–3 such trips in the past year, 28.4% in 4–6 trips, and 18.8% had taken part in more than six culinary tours. A smaller segment (11.7%) reported engaging in only one culinary travel activity. Respondents frequently cited Yogyakarta, Bali, Bandung, Sumatra Barat, Makassar, and Medan when asked about their most memorable culinary destinations. These cities are well-known for their rich food cultures and symbolic significance in Indonesia's culinary identity. This demographic and experiential diversity reinforces the study's relevance to

contemporary discussions on digitally mediated and emotionally resonant gastronomic tourism in the Indonesian context.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Before proceeding to the structural model, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed to ensure the robustness of the reflective constructs. In line with PLS-SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2019), the evaluation focused on three key aspects: indicator reliability,

construct reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity. All constructs in this study were modeled reflectively. Convergent validity, which examines the degree to which a set of indicators shares a high proportion of variance, was evaluated through standardized factor loadings. As presented in Table 2, all retained indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming that each item significantly contributes to its respective latent construct.

Table 2. Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

Indicator	Loadings
Concrete Experience (CE): α=.863; CR=.907; AVE=.710	
CE1: My culinary experience felt vivid and memorable.	0.759
CE2: I can recall details of my culinary experience.	0.861
CE3: The experience involved emotional interaction.	0.874
CE4: I felt deeply engaged during the culinary experience.	0.872
Cultural Immersion (CI): α=.900; CR=.938; AVE=.834	
CI1: I participated in local food customs during my visit.	0.885
CI2: I dined with residents during my culinary trip.	0.936
CI3: I learned about the local culture through food.	0.918
Digital Engagement (DE): α=.908; CR=.935; AVE=.784	
DE1: I searched for culinary information on social media.	0.905
DE2: I shared my culinary experiences online.	0.850
DE3: I actively follow culinary content on social media.	0.895
DE4: I interact with digital content about culinary destinations.	0.900
Emotional Attachment (EA): α=.867; CR=.910; AVE=.716	
EA1: I feel emotionally connected to this culinary destination.	0.820
EA2: I miss the culinary experiences I had there.	0.883
EA3: I feel the destination has become part of me.	0.811
EA4: I have a strong emotional bond with this place.	0.870
Destination Advocacy (GDA): α=.872; CR=.913; AVE=.723	
GDA1: I talk about this culinary experience to others.	0.802
GDA2: I willingly share reviews or stories about this place.	0.859
GDA3: I proudly recommend this culinary destination.	0.880
GDA4: I actively promote this place to others.	0.858
Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty (GTL): α=.881; CR=.913; AVE=.679	
GTL1: I intend to revisit this culinary destination.	0.719
GTL2: I would recommend this place to others.	0.835
GTL3: I prefer this destination over others.	0.818
GTL4: I would return for a similar culinary experience.	0.890
GTL5: I am satisfied and will return.	0.848

Indicator	Loadings
Haptic Tourism (HT): α=.898; CR=.925; AVE=.711	
HT1: I directly tasted local food on-site.	0.825
HT2: I participated in cooking activities during my trip.	0.815
HT3: I experienced the aroma and texture of local food.	0.860
HT4: I interacted with local ingredients during the trip.	0.836
HT5: I enjoyed the sensory aspects of the culinary experience.	0.878
Place Branding (PB): α=.910; CR=.937; AVE=.788	
PB1: This place has a strong culinary identity.	0.848
PB2: The culinary branding reflects the local culture.	0.904
PB3: Culinary narratives attracted me to visit.	0.909
PB4: I recognized this place from its culinary promotions.	0.878
Social Media Induced Tourism (SMT): α=.856; CR=.913; AVE=.777	
SMT1: I was interested in this place after seeing it on social media.	0.868
SMT2: I followed culinary trends that went viral.	0.885
SMT3: Social media influenced my travel decisions.	0.892

Source: Research Data (2025)

The final test focused on discriminant validity, which assesses whether a construct is empirically distinct. This study utilized the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations—considered a more stringent criterion than the Fornell-Larcker approach (Henseler et al., 2015). As presented in Table 4, all HTMT values fell below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The highest observed value was 0.793 (between Place Branding and Destination Advocacy), affirming that each construct is conceptually and empirically distinct.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	CE	CI	DE	EA	GDA	GTL	HT	PB
CI	.574	–						
DE	.607	.545	–					
EA	.682	.716	.682	–				
GDA	.646	.540	.472	.560	–			
GTL	.612	.430	.523	.542	.783	–		
HT	.780	.541	.680	.674	.625	.629	–	
PB	.768	.528	.455	.511	.793	.645	.684	–
SMIT	.623	.475	.567	.582	.661	.646	.585	.540

Source: Research Data (2025)

The results from the measurement model evaluation confirm that all constructs meet the established criteria for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. With the measurement model confirmed as statistically sound, the analysis proceeds to the structural model to examine the hypothesized relationships among constructs.

Structural Model Evaluation

Following the successful validation of the measurement model, the next step involved evaluating the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships between latent constructs. This stage includes assessments of the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), path coefficients, total effects, and model fit indices, all estimated using the PLS-SEM

procedure with 5,000 bootstrap subsamples. The coefficient of determination (R^2) reflects the proportion of variance explained in each endogenous construct. As summarized in Table 4, the model demonstrates strong explanatory power, particularly for Concrete Experience, which is influenced by five antecedents—Social Media-Induced Tourism (SMIT), Haptic Tourism, Place Branding, Digital Engagement, and Cultural Immersion—with an R^2 of 0.619. This is considered substantial in behavioural studies. Meanwhile, Emotional Attachment ($R^2 = 0.342$), Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty ($R^2 = 0.295$), and Destination Advocacy ($R^2 = 0.540$) all reflect moderate explanatory capacity, indicating meaningful predictive accuracy.

Table 4. R^2 and Q^2

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Q^2
Concrete Experience	.614	.432
Emotional Attachment	.341	.243
Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty	.293	.196
Gastronomic Destination Advocacy	.537	.384

Source: Research Data (2025)

The Q^2 values, calculated using the blindfolding technique, all exceed zero, reaffirming that the model has adequate predictive relevance for its endogenous variables. The path analysis revealed that most of the hypothesized relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with two paths—Digital Engagement → Concrete Experience and Cultural Immersion → Concrete Experience—significant at the 10% level ($p < 0.1$). The strongest path was from Concrete Experience to Emotional Attachment ($\beta = 0.585$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing its pivotal role in affective engagement. The full results are displayed in Table 5 and visualized in Figure 2.
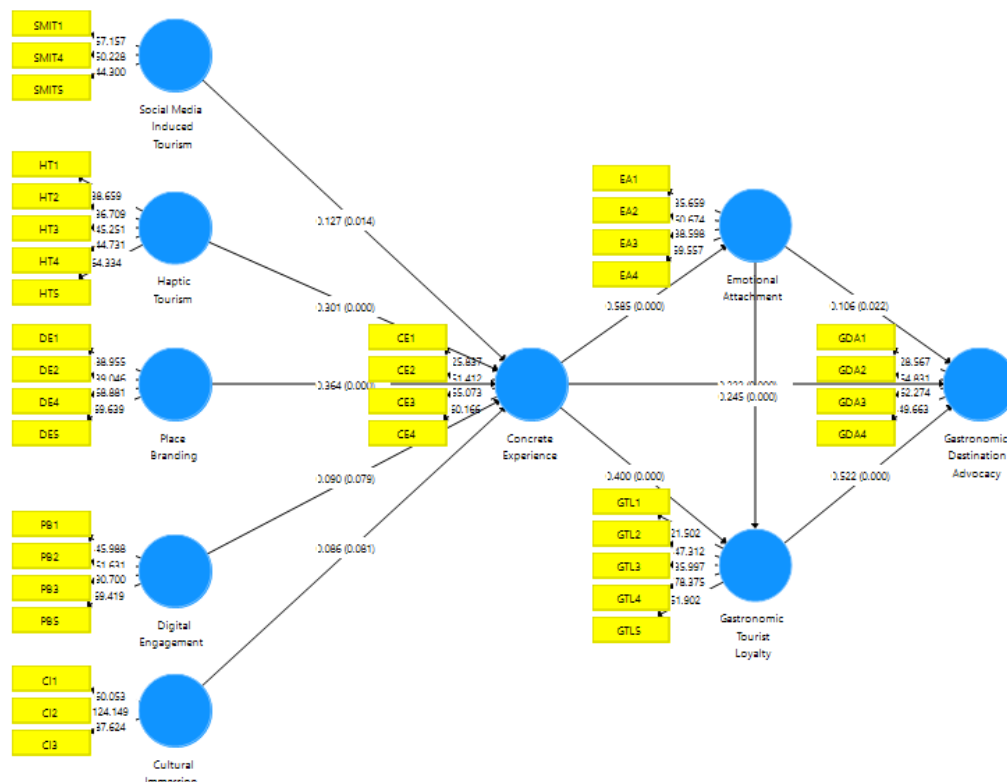
Figure 2. Evaluated Model (Source: Research Data, 2025)

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	β	T-Stat.	p-Value	Result
H1: SMIT → Concrete Experience	.127	2.454	.014	Supported
H2: Haptic Tourism → Concrete Experience	.301	4.260	.000	Supported
H3: Place Branding → Concrete Experience	.364	6.048	.000	Supported
H4: Digital Engagement → Concrete Experience	.090	1.760	.079	Supported*
H5: Cultural Immersion → Concrete Experience	.086	1.747	.081	Supported*
H6: Concrete Experience → Emotional Attachment	.585	15.129	.000	Supported
H7: Concrete Experience → Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty	.400	6.783	.000	Supported
H8: Emotional Attachment → Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty	.245	3.883	.000	Supported
H9: Concrete Experience → Gastronomic Destination Advocacy	.222	4.259	.000	Supported
H10: Emotional Attachment → Gastronomic Destination Advocacy	.106	2.294	.022	Supported
H11: Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty → Gastronomic Destination Advocacy	.522	10.636	.000	Supported

Source: Research Data (2025)

These findings underscore the central role of Concrete Experience as a key mediating construct, bridging both symbolic and sensory antecedents with emotional and behavioural outcomes in culinary tourism. Beyond direct effects, total effect estimates provide insight into the cumulative impact of both direct and indirect paths. As shown in Table 6, constructs such as Place Branding Haptic Tourism, and Social Media-Induced Tourism exert notable influence on Destination Advocacy and Gastronomic Tourist Loyalty through mediation by Concrete Experience and Emotional Attachment.

Table 6. Total Effects Summary (Key Paths)

From	To	β	T-Statistic	p-Value
CE	DA	0.567	12.764	0.000
CE	GTL	0.543	12.740	0.000
EA	DA	0.234	4.111	0.000
EA	GTL	0.245	3.883	0.000
PB	DA	0.206	4.765	0.000
PB	GTL	0.197	5.622	0.000
HT	DA	0.171	4.341	0.000
HT	GTL	0.164	3.812	0.000
SMIT	DA	0.072	2.531	0.011
SMIT	GTL	0.069	2.448	0.014

Source: Research Data (2025)

These patterns reinforce that emotionally resonant and sensorially grounded experiences—especially those embedded in local identity and digital narratives—can effectively drive post-visit behaviours. Although the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for the saturated model was 0.051—well below the recommended threshold of 0.08—the SRMR for the estimated model was 0.111, exceeding the conservative cutoff. This discrepancy is not uncommon in models with multiple mediation pathways and high construct intercorrelations, particularly in behaviourally grounded tourism studies involving emotion and identity dimensions (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2021). To further assess model fit and rule out specification errors, additional indices were considered. The Root Mean Square Theta (rms_theta) value was 0.119, which is within the acceptable threshold (<0.12), suggesting good indicator reliability and reflective specification. Likewise, the d_ULS (8.165) and d_G (0.960) fall within the expected range, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.817) exceeds the 0.80 acceptability threshold, as reported in Table 7.

Table 7. Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Threshold
SRMR	0.051	0.111	< 0.08 preferred
d_ULS	1.717	8.165	–
d_G	0.728	0.960	–
Chi-Square	1.866.506	2.223.447	–
NFI	0.846	0.817	> 0.80 acceptable

Source: Research Data (2025)

The structural model confirms that Concrete Experience serves as the experiential bridge between symbolic elements (branding, media influence), sensory stimuli (haptic tourism), and emotional outcomes (attachment, loyalty, advocacy). The results affirm a multi-pathway, experience-centered framework for understanding behavioural engagement in gastronomic tourism, highlighting the importance of authentic, multisensory, and digitally curated experiences in shaping tourist loyalty and advocacy.

Discussion

This study sought to unpack the mechanisms through which symbolic, sensory, and digital antecedents shape tourists' concrete experiences and how these experiences, in turn, influence emotional and behavioural outcomes in the context of Indonesian gastronomic tourism. The findings illuminate several key dynamics that validate the proposed model and extend current experiential tourism theory.

At the heart of the model lies concrete experience, which emerged as a powerful mediating construct linking upstream stimuli (e.g., place branding, haptic tourism, social media) to downstream outcomes like emotional attachment, loyalty, and destination advocacy. The high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.619$) confirms its pivotal role in how tourists internalize and transform abstract or virtual stimuli into vivid, embodied memories. This reinforces experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), which asserts that behavioural learning begins with direct, sensorial experience—not abstract reflection alone.

Place branding ($\beta = 0.364$) and haptic tourism ($\beta = 0.301$) were the strongest contributors to concrete experience. These findings confirm that symbolic resonance and sensory embodiment operate as dual levers in shaping deep experiential impact. Place branding works through cognitive pre-framing: it infuses destinations with meaning even before arrival. Stories about

culinary heritage, local identity, or artisanal practices shape tourists' expectations and interpretive schemas (Chen et al., 2022; Yu & Na, 2022). Thus, when the actual visit occurs, branding helps tourists decode and emotionally register what might otherwise be a fleeting food encounter. Haptic tourism, in contrast, operates on-site through embodied participation. Engaging with texture, aroma, and hands-on food rituals activates what (Kolb, 2015) refers to as concrete learning—a state where memory, sensation, and meaning are tightly fused. Prior studies confirm that multisensory engagement leads to higher emotional arousal and stronger memory encoding (Aksenova et al., 2022; Yiannakou et al., 2022), which explains why HT exerts a stronger experiential impact than observational or passive consumption modes. Together, PB and HT dominate because they bookend the tourist experience: one frames it cognitively, the other delivers it somatically.

By contrast, digital engagement (β = 0.090, $p < 0.1$) and cultural immersion (β = 0.086, $p < 0.1$) exert marginal influence on concrete experience. This nuance is theoretically important. For Digital Engagement, the disparity may lie in type and depth. While digital content is widely accessed, it is often passive and performative (e.g., scrolling, liking, reposting), which does not necessarily translate into emotionally immersive or memorable experiences (Deb & Mallik, 2023; Zheng, 2023). In other words, DE primes expectation but does not guarantee enactment. The anticipatory nature of digital engagement, while useful for inspiration, lacks the embodied immediacy that HT and PB offer.

Cultural immersion should theoretically enhance experience via deep social and symbolic participation. However, its marginal influence may reflect variability in depth of engagement—many tourists may observe rituals rather than participate in them, diluting the emotional payoff (Ismanto et al., 2022; Song & Kim, 2022). Moreover, the timing of impact may differ:

immersion might foster longer-term attachment rather than immediate concrete memory, which this study measures. Thus, while DE and CI remain conceptually relevant, their statistical marginality suggests that presence, performance, and participation are stronger triggers of memorable experience than anticipation or observation alone.

The relationship between concrete experience and emotional attachment (β = 0.585) emerged as the strongest in the model. This underscores the affective depth generated from sensorial and participatory travel, supporting the argument that attachment arises from embodied, meaningful experiences—not just satisfaction or transactional value (Hasan, 2023; Lever et al., 2022). When food encounters provoke surprise, nostalgia, or cultural intimacy, they forge lasting emotional bonds with place. This attachment positively influenced gastronomic tourist loyalty (β = 0.245) and destination advocacy (β = 0.106), reinforcing its mediating role in post-visit behaviour (Aksoy & Yazici, 2023; Obradović, 2024). Meanwhile, concrete experience also had strong direct effects on loyalty (β = 0.400) and advocacy (β = 0.222), showing that the experience itself, especially when rich in novelty and affect, is sufficient to drive behaviour—without needing intermediaries like satisfaction.

Finally, loyalty strongly predicted advocacy (β = 0.522), affirming the traditional tourism logic that loyal tourists are more likely to promote destinations. Yet, given the emotional and symbolic depth of food tourism, this study also supports recent findings that advocacy can arise from singular, transformative experiences, not only from repeat visits (Cuadra et al., 2023; Srivastava et al., 2022).

Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to a more experientially grounded gastronomic tourism model that integrates symbolic, sensory, and digital

components into a coherent framework. It advances the field by positioning experience not as a mediator alone but as a behavioural force in its own right, echoing calls in recent scholarship for more embodied, affect-driven models of tourist behaviour (Kolb & Kolb, 2022; Morón-Corujeira & Fusté-Forné, 2022). Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers and tourism developers. Efforts to promote gastronomic tourism should focus on visual branding and online engagement and curating immersive, story-rich food experiences. This includes organizing cooking workshops, market tours, traditional food festivals, and interactive digital content, allowing tourists to feel sensorially stimulated and emotionally connected.

The study confirms that concrete gastronomic experiences, shaped by branding, social media, sensory immersion, and cultural participation, are powerful predictors of emotional attachment and behavioural loyalty. These findings reassert the centrality of embodied experience in tourism and provide a compelling case for rethinking how destinations craft, market, and measure gastronomic offerings—not merely as consumables but as cultural experiences that shape memory, identity, and belonging.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the mechanisms through which symbolic, sensory, and participatory antecedents influence tourists' concrete gastronomic experiences and how these experiences, in turn, shape emotional and behavioural outcomes in the context of Indonesian culinary tourism. The results demonstrate that concrete experience acts as a central mediating construct, translating abstract stimuli—such as branding narratives or social media imagery—into emotionally resonant, sensorially rich encounters. Among the five antecedents examined, place branding and haptic tourism exerted the strongest influence on concrete experience, indicating that cultural storytelling and hands-on culinary participation are vital in crafting memorable encounters. While digital engagement and cultural immersion also had positive effects, their influence was more modest, suggesting that anticipatory exposure and symbolic participation must be grounded in physical interaction to fully translate into meaningful experience.

The study further revealed that concrete experience significantly fosters emotional attachment, reinforcing the idea that attachment to a place is not simply an outcome of satisfaction but emerges through deep, embodied involvement. Emotional attachment, in turn, positively affected both gastronomic tourist loyalty and destination advocacy, though concrete experience also directly influenced these behavioural outcomes. These findings suggest two interconnected pathways to behavioural commitment: one affective, through emotional bonding, and one experiential, rooted in the richness and memorability of the visit itself. Together, the findings validate the proposed model and underscore the importance of designing participatory, multisensory tourism offerings that align with the identity of place and the psychological needs of travellers.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. As a cross-sectional survey, it captures a snapshot in time and cannot account for how emotional connections or advocacy intentions evolve longitudinally. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the risk of recall bias or socially desirable responses, especially when reflecting on affective experiences. The use of non-probability purposive sampling, while appropriate for targeting experienced culinary tourists, may also limit generalizability to broader traveller populations.

Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to track how emotional attachment deepens or fades post-visit, as well as experimental designs that manipulate digital, sensory, or symbolic

cues to assess their causal impact on experience formation. Qualitative studies could enrich the model by capturing the narrative dimensions of tourist memory and advocacy, while cross-cultural comparisons would allow for testing whether these mechanisms hold in different gastronomic or cultural contexts. Overall, this research offers a nuanced, empirically supported framework for understanding how concrete, affective, and symbolic dimensions of experience intertwine to shape loyalty and advocacy in the evolving landscape of gastronomic tourism.

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