

Tourists' Local Food Experience: Linking Cultural Value, Knowledge, and Product Quality to Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction

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Abstract

Local food consumption in tourism represents a cognitive and affective process through which visitors interpret cultural meaning and evaluate quality. This study develops and tests an integrative model linking cultural value, knowledge appreciation, and product quality to branding, perceived economic value, and consumption satisfaction. Data from 319 domestic and international tourists who experienced Indonesian gastronomy were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Results show that cultural value and local identity strongly enhance knowledge and cultural appreciation, which in turn increase perceived product quality and support for local communities. These cognitive–ethical factors exert the greatest influence on emotional satisfaction, while branding alone shows no significant direct effect. Perceived quality and community alignment, rather than aesthetic branding, drive tourists' emotional engagement and satisfaction. Theoretically, this study introduces the concept of cognitive–ethical authenticity to explain how knowledge and moral resonance jointly produce satisfaction in gastronomic tourism. Managerially, the findings highlight that effective destination strategies should prioritise interpretive learning, transparent sourcing, and community-based experience design over symbolic branding. Overall, the research clarifies the cultural–cognitive pathway that underpins satisfaction in gastronomic experiences and advances a framework for authenticity-centred tourism development.

Keywords: Cultural Value; Knowledge Appreciation; Cognitive–Ethical Authenticity; Product Quality; Gastronomic Satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Food consumption in tourism is no longer understood as a hedonic act but as a cognitive performance through which travellers interpret culture and negotiate moral meaning. In contemporary research, gastronomy is theorised as a site where authenticity, ethics, and pleasure intersect—raising the question of how tourists transform cultural encounters into emotional and evaluative judgments (Baimoratova et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Yet despite growing recognition of food's symbolic role, tourism studies have not fully explained how cultural understanding translates into satisfaction.

Two theoretical streams dominate current debates. The symbolic–cultural approach conceptualises gastronomy as heritage and identity work, emphasising authenticity, local values, and slow-food ethics as mediators of meaning (Freitas et al., 2024; Ravančić et al., 2024). The market–experiential approach, in contrast, views food as an experiential commodity in which product quality, branding, and perceived value determine loyalty and revisit intention (Bayraktar et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). While the former privileges moral interpretation, the latter reduces satisfaction to market stimuli. Taken together, both traditions overlook the cognitive mechanisms through which culture and market logics converge in shaping tourists' emotions.

What remains theoretically underdeveloped is the causal chain connecting symbolic–cultural constructs (cultural value, knowledge, identity) to evaluative–

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market outcomes (quality, branding, satisfaction). Existing models treat authenticity and branding as parallel predictors rather than sequential processes of meaning formation. This fragmentation obscures how cognitive learning and ethical appreciation mediate tourists' perception of product quality and their emotional responses. As a result, we still lack an integrative framework explaining why branding often fails to evoke satisfaction unless grounded in cultural understanding.

This study addresses that gap by proposing and empirically testing a cultural–cognitive model of local food experience. We argue that satisfaction emerges not from symbolic branding but from cognitive–ethical authenticity—the alignment between understanding, moral resonance, and sensory quality. Using data from 319 domestic and international tourists who experienced Indonesian gastronomy, the study applies PLS-SEM to examine how cultural value and knowledge appreciation shape product quality, community support, perceived value, and emotional satisfaction. Theoretically, it bridges cultural identity theory and consumer–experience models, repositioning authenticity as a cognitive mechanism rather than a marketing trope. Practically, it offers guidance for destination managers to design interpretive, community-aligned gastronomic experiences that link learning with pleasure and sustainability..

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Value and Knowledge Appreciation

Local food operates as a cognitive medium through which tourists interpret identity and authenticity. Cultural value represents the symbolic foundation that embeds food within collective memory and local identity, while knowledge and cultural appreciation capture tourists' interpretive engagement with that symbolism. Prior studies demonstrate that authenticity narratives—heritage preservation, traditional recipes, and origin stories—constitute the main channel through which tourists learn and value culture (Ishak et al., 2023; Putri & Wijoyo, 2023; Tiganis & Chrysochou, 2024). Such encounters transform food from a commodity into a pedagogical artefact, enabling visitors to understand regional distinctiveness and moral significance (Bardolet-Puigdollers & Fusté-Forné, 2023; Çetin, 2024). Hence, cultural value acts as an antecedent condition that stimulates knowledge acquisition and interpretive appreciation, confirming the dynamic role of gastronomy in preserving identity amid globalisation pressures (Carfora & Catellani, 2023; Vafadari et al., 2025). Taken together, these works suggest that cultural value does not directly generate satisfaction but initiates a cognitive process of learning and empathy. This study, therefore, conceptualises Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation (KCA) as the mediating bridge through which cultural identity becomes meaningful to tourists.

H1: Cultural Value and Local Identity positively influence Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation.

From Knowledge to Product Quality and Community Support

Tourists' cultural learning shapes their evaluative standards of quality. Beyond sensory pleasure, food quality is assessed through symbolic and ethical lenses—freshness, sustainability, and authenticity signify integrity and craftsmanship (Morkūnas et al., 2024; Simpson et al., 2024). Knowledge also elicits moral attachment: the more tourists appreciate cultural heritage, the more they perceive consumption as an ethical act sustaining community livelihoods (Chejor et al., 2023; Kalantzis et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). Empirical evidence in gastronomic destinations shows that cultural appreciation enhances willingness to support local farmers and pay price premiums for authentic, ethically sourced food (Coubet et al., 2024; Katz et al., 2025). In this view, knowledge appreciation operates as both a cognitive and ethical filter connecting culture to evaluation and pro-social orientation.

H2: Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation positively influence Product Quality Perception.

H3: Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation positively influence Support for Local Community.

From Knowledge to Branding and Attractiveness

Branding in gastronomic tourism functions not merely as visual promotion but as a semiotic translation of culture. Tourists who possess higher cultural knowledge are more capable of decoding symbolic cues—logos, narratives, and packaging—as authentic expressions of local identity (Bayraktar et al., 2023; Mou et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024). Thus, branding effectiveness depends on tourists' interpretive competence, not only marketers' design. Cross-cultural research supports this view, showing that brand appeal intensifies when consumers can recognise cultural meaning in the product story (Baby & Joseph, 2023; Tiganis & Chrysochou, 2024). This perspective reframes the causal logic: cultural knowledge precedes brand perception because it enables meaning recognition. In other words, cultural literacy is brand literacy. Consequently, knowledge and

appreciation enhance branding attractiveness by allowing tourists to perceive symbolic coherence between product image and cultural origin.

H4: Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation positively influence Branding and Product Attractiveness.

Community Support and Branding Synergy

Community alignment strengthens brand credibility by embedding moral authenticity into destination image. When tourists perceive tangible community benefits—such as fair-trade sourcing, local employment, or shared narratives—brand attractiveness increases through ethical resonance (Angelakis et al., 2023; Bain, 2024; Jeong et al., 2023). Branding, therefore, becomes a moral performance rather than mere aesthetics. Evidence from sustainable gastronomy further shows that cooperative producer networks amplify both authenticity and competitiveness (Mahmudi, 2023; Pérez et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that community support is not an external CSR variable but an intrinsic dimension of brand meaning.

H5: Support for the Local Community positively influences Branding and Product Attractiveness.

Product Quality, Branding, and Consumption Satisfaction

Quality and branding operate synergistically in shaping emotional satisfaction. Perceived quality triggers trust and sensory delight, while branding amplifies emotional attachment by communicating authenticity and cultural coherence (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024; Sjuhada & Zulfa, 2024; So et al., 2023). However, research also shows that strong branding fails to sustain satisfaction without credible quality cues (Juliana et al., 2023; Pandowo & Mamuya, 2023). This tension underlies the current model: satisfaction arises from the alignment of tangible excellence and symbolic authenticity.

H6: Product Quality Perception positively influences Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction.

H8: Branding and Product Attractiveness positively influence Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction.

Branding, Price, and Perceived Economic Value

Branding also shapes price interpretation. When tourists perceive branding as culturally grounded, they rationalise premium prices as expressions of heritage and community value (Susanto, 2023; Utomo & Susanto, 2025). Storytelling and authenticity transform payment into participation, legitimising economic value through moral justification (Suryana et al., 2025).

H7: Branding and Product Attractiveness positively influence Price and Perceived Economic Value.

Integrative Conceptual Framework

Taken together, prior studies indicate that tourists' satisfaction with local gastronomy follows a cultural–cognitive–experiential sequence. Cultural value and local identity (H1) trigger learning processes that enhance knowledge and appreciation, which subsequently shape perceptions of product quality (H2) and community support (H3). These cognitions extend to symbolic interpretation through branding (H4–H5), influencing perceived economic value (H7) and emotional satisfaction (H6–H8). In this integrative chain, cognitive–ethical authenticity—the convergence of understanding, morality, and quality—emerges as the core theoretical mechanism linking cultural foundations to experiential outcomes as depicted in Figure 1.

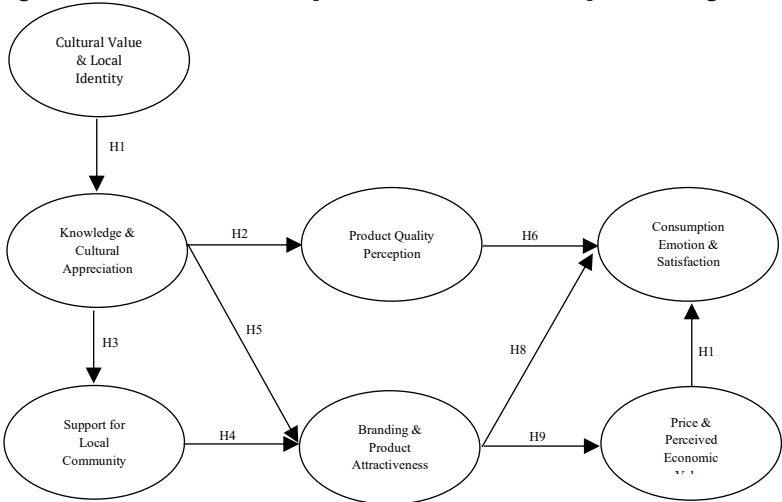


Figure 1. Proposed Model

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the causal relationships among cultural value, knowledge, and cultural appreciation; product quality perception; support for the local community; branding and product attractiveness; price and perceived economic value; and consumption emotion and satisfaction. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for predictive and theory-developing objectives in behavioural tourism studies involving complex latent constructs measured reflectively. Compared to covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM focuses on explained variance and prediction accuracy rather than model fit, making it appropriate for testing emerging frameworks such as cognitive–ethical authenticity (Hair et al., 2024). The method also accommodates non-normal data and moderate sample sizes, enhancing its suitability for cross-cultural tourism research characterised by heterogeneous respondents.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study targeted domestic and international tourists who had experienced local gastronomy in Indonesia within the past 12 months. A non-probability purposive sampling approach was employed because the research required participants with direct familiarity with local food and its cultural context. Random sampling could include uninformed respondents, potentially weakening construct validity. Following (Calder et al., 1981), purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for theory-testing studies seeking analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Potential sampling bias was mitigated through three procedures: 1) Quota balancing between domestic and international respondents to ensure representational diversity; 2) Multiple recruitment channels, including tourism-related social media, culinary communities, and travel forums, to reduce platform bias; and 3) Screening questions confirming that respondents had experienced at least one local food activity (e.g., tasting, cooking class, or food tour). Data collection took place between May and August 2025 using an online structured questionnaire. After excluding incomplete and inconsistent responses, 319 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. This sample size exceeded the 10-times rule and satisfied power analysis for complex PLS-SEM models (Hair et al., 2024), confirming sufficient analytical robustness.

Measurement and Instrumentation

All constructs were measured reflectively using multi-item Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Items were adapted from previously validated instruments in cultural and gastronomic tourism studies (Table 1), with contextual adjustments to fit Indonesian cuisine. Each construct contained four to six indicators to ensure content coverage and reliability.

Table 1. Measurement Items

Construct	Code	Description	Source
Cultural Value and Local Identity (CV)	CV1–CV4	Tourists' recognition of the symbolic, heritage, and authenticity aspects of local cuisine	(Baimoratova et al., 2023; Tiganis & Chrysochou, 2024)
Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation (KCA)	KCA1–KCA5	Tourists' awareness, understanding, and appreciation of culinary narratives, preparation, and traditions	(Ishak et al., 2023; Purnomo et al., 2023)
Product Quality Perception (PQP)	PQP1–PQP6	Evaluation of sensory, ethical, and authenticity-based quality dimensions such as freshness, sustainability, and craftsmanship	(Courbet et al., 2024; Morkūnas et al., 2024)
Support for Local Community (SLC)	SLC1–SLC5	Intention to support local producers, ethical consumption, and community-based initiatives	(Chejor et al., 2023; Kalantzis et al., 2023)
Branding and Product Attractiveness (BPA)	BPA1–BPA5	Perceived distinctiveness and appeal of local food brands are grounded in cultural narratives and authenticity.	(Bayraktar et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024)
Price and Perceived Economic Value (PPEV)	PPEV1–PPEV5	Tourists' perception of the local food's worth and willingness to pay based on its symbolic and experiential value	Fu & Chen (2023); Ho et al. (2024)
Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction (CES)	CES1–CES6	Positive affective responses and overall satisfaction derived from local food experiences	(Sjhada & Zulfa, 2024; So et al., 2023)

Source: Research data, 2025

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SmartPLS 4.0 following a two-stage procedure (Hair et al., 2024): First, Measurement Model Evaluation: Indicator reliability was confirmed by standardised loadings ≥ 0.70 . Internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (> 0.70). Convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted ($AVE > 0.50$). Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell–Larcker and Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT < 0.85) criteria (Henseler et al., 2015). Multicollinearity was tested via the Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF < 3.3$). Second, Structural Model Evaluation: Hypothesised paths were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples ($p < 0.05$). The model's explanatory power was examined using R^2 , while effect sizes (f^2) were interpreted as small (0.02), medium (0.15), or large (0.35) following (Cohen, 2013). Predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed via the Stone–Geisser criterion, where $Q^2 > 0$ indicates acceptable predictive accuracy. Key validity and model-fit statistics are summarised in-text before tabular presentation to enhance readability. A graphical PLS path model (Figure 2) presents all hypothesised relationships (H1–H8) with standardised coefficients.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

A total of 319 valid responses were analysed, representing a demographically and socioeconomically diverse group of tourists with recent exposure to Indonesian gastronomy. Screening confirmed that 90.6% had directly participated in culinary-related travel activities—such as tasting regional cuisines, visiting food markets, or attending gastronomic festivals—ensuring strong experiential relevance for assessing cultural and sensory dimensions of local food. Gender and generational composition reveal key patterns consistent with contemporary gastronomic tourism. Female travellers (58.3%) dominated the sample, reflecting a well-documented tendency toward higher cultural curiosity and affective engagement in food-related experiences (Baimoratova et al., 2023). Generationally, the largest cohort was Generation X (39.2%), followed by Generation Z (31.7%) and Millennials (24.1%), with Baby Boomers (5%) forming a smaller segment. This balance indicates that both younger digital travellers and mature experience seekers actively engage in food-based cultural exploration—a demographic mix that enhances the generalizability of the findings across age-based consumption motives.

In terms of education, the sample was highly literate: 94.7% held undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. This supports the analytical reliability of responses concerning abstract constructs such as authenticity, cultural learning, and cognitive–ethical appreciation. Income levels were concentrated in the middle-to-upper strata (74% earning $\geq$ IDR 5 million/month), aligning with the purchasing power typical of cultural and experiential tourists. Occupationally, civil servants and professionals (61.7%) formed the majority, complemented by students (28.2%), indicating the coexistence of stability-driven and exploratory consumption orientations within the sample. Taken together, this demographic profile represents the core consumer base of emerging gastronomic tourism in Indonesia—educated, financially stable, and culturally motivated travellers who interpret food not merely as sustenance but as an expression of identity and value. Their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds provide a credible foundation for examining how cultural understanding, product quality, and branding interact to shape emotional satisfaction and support for local communities.

Measurement Model

The reflective measurement model was evaluated to assess indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and multicollinearity. All constructs were modelled reflectively, meaning that observed indicators represent manifestations of their underlying latent variables.

Reliability and Convergent Validity

All indicators demonstrated strong reliability, with standardised outer loadings ranging from 0.704 to 0.920, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.832 to 0.907, and Composite Reliability (CR) ranged from 0.888 to 0.928, confirming high internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all above 0.50 (0.644–0.793), indicating adequate convergent validity (see Table 2). These findings confirm that each construct reliably captures the underlying conceptual dimensions proposed in the model—such as how cultural value and knowledge appreciation jointly express the cognitive–ethical interpretation of gastronomy, and how product quality and branding represent evaluative and emotional engagement with food experiences.

Table 2. Reflective Indicators, Outer Loadings, and Construct Reliability

Construct / Reflective Statement	Outer Loading
Branding & Product Attractiveness (BPA) ($\alpha=0.870$; $CR=0.920$; $AVE=0.793$)	
BPA1. Local food products in this destination are visually appealing and well-presented.	0.864
BPA2. The branding and packaging of local culinary products make them attractive to tourists.	0.887
BPA3. The uniqueness and authenticity of the local food brand increase my interest in trying it.	0.920
Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction (CES) ($\alpha=0.907$; $CR=0.928$; $AVE=0.683$)	
CES1. Consuming local food made me feel happy and emotionally fulfilled.	0.822
CES2. I felt relaxed and comfortable while enjoying local food during my visit.	0.754
CES3. The local food experience gave me a sense of excitement and pleasure.	0.853
CES4. I was satisfied with the overall local culinary experience.	0.867
CES5. I felt proud to experience the local culinary culture.	0.825
CES6. I would recommend this local food experience to others because it was enjoyable.	0.831
Cultural Value & Local Identity (CV) ($\alpha=0.832$; $CR=0.888$; $AVE=0.666$)	
CV1. Local food reflects the traditions and cultural heritage of the community.	0.828
CV2. The preparation and presentation of local dishes show local identity.	0.810
CV3. I believe that local food represents the cultural values of its people.	0.825
CV4. The local culinary products strengthen the regional identity of this destination.	0.800
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation (KCA) ($\alpha=0.861$; $CR=0.900$; $AVE=0.644$)	
KCA1. I learned about the culture and traditions through local food.	0.809
KCA2. I appreciate the skill and knowledge of local cooks and producers.	0.823
KCA3. The local food experience helped me understand local community values.	0.871
KCA4. I gained new knowledge about local ingredients and their uses.	0.733
KCA5. I value the creativity shown in adapting traditional food to modern tastes.	0.770
Price & Perceived Economic Value (PPEV) ($\alpha=0.867$; $CR=0.905$; $AVE=0.657$)	
PPEV1. The local food is worth the price I paid.	0.846
PPEV2. The price of local dishes is reasonable compared to their quality.	0.864
PPEV3. I consider local culinary products to have good value for money.	0.858
PPEV4. The price of local food reflects its authenticity and uniqueness.	0.767
PPEV5. I would be willing to pay a little more for high-quality local food.	0.704
Product Quality Perception (PQP) ($\alpha=0.899$; $CR=0.922$; $AVE=0.665$)	
PQP1. The local food has fresh ingredients and excellent taste.	0.786
PQP2. Local culinary products maintain high hygiene and preparation standards.	0.852
PQP3. The quality of local dishes is consistent across visits.	0.825
PQP4. The local cuisine is visually appealing and well-prepared.	0.839
PQP5. The local dishes meet or exceed my expectations of food quality.	0.763
PQP6. I believe that local culinary products are professionally produced.	0.824
Support for Local Community (SLC) ($\alpha=0.874$; $CR=0.909$; $AVE=0.668$)	
SLC1. Purchasing local food contributes to the income of residents.	0.845
SLC2. I feel that buying local food helps support local farmers and producers.	0.865
SLC3. I prefer to consume local food to sustain the local economy.	0.873
SLC4. I am aware that local food tourism employs local people.	0.709
SLC5. I intentionally choose local products to support community development.	0.784

Source: Research data, 2025

Discriminant Validity and Multicollinearity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), with all values below the conservative cut-off of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). The highest ratio (0.892) appeared between Support for Local Community and Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction, which conceptually aligns with the emotional gratification tourists derive from socially responsible consumption. This theoretical closeness supports rather than threatens construct distinctiveness. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.437 to 3.591, well below the critical threshold of 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Each construct thus contributed unique explanatory variance to the model.

Interpretation

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates excellent psychometric properties consistent with recommended thresholds in tourism research (Hair et al., 2024). The constructs—ranging from cultural value and knowledge appreciation to branding and satisfaction—exhibit both empirical distinctiveness and conceptual coherence. This confirms that the model successfully captures the multidimensional structure of

tourists' cultural-cognitive and experiential engagement with local food. The robustness of the measurement results provides a strong foundation for subsequent structural model analysis, allowing for reliable interpretation of causal relationships among cultural, cognitive, and affective constructs in gastronomic tourism.

Structural Model

The structural model was assessed to test the hypothesised relationships and to evaluate the model's explanatory and predictive performance. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples confirmed the stability of the estimates. Eight of the nine hypotheses were supported, forming a coherent cultural–cognitive–experiential pathway connecting cultural identity, knowledge appreciation, evaluative judgment, and emotional satisfaction.

Key Path Relationships

Cultural Value and Local Identity exerted a strong and significant effect on Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation ($\beta = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that local cuisines grounded in regional identity serve as powerful instruments of cultural transmission. Knowledge and Cultural Appreciation significantly influenced Product Quality Perception ($\beta = 0.550$, $p < 0.001$), Support for Local Community ($\beta = 0.586$, $p < 0.001$), and Branding and Product Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.217$, $p = 0.023$). These effects demonstrate that cognitive engagement with culture translates into both evaluative and pro-social behaviours. Support for Local Community also enhanced Branding and Product Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that consumers find brands more appealing when they perceive tangible community benefits. Branding and Product Attractiveness strongly affected Price and Perceived Economic Value ($\beta = 0.490$, $p < 0.001$), showing that credible branding legitimises price fairness and symbolic worth. Finally, Product Quality Perception ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$) and Price and Perceived Economic Value ($\beta = 0.180$, $p = 0.036$) both predicted Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction, underscoring that satisfaction stems from the alignment of tangible excellence and perceived fairness. The direct path from Branding and Product Attractiveness to Consumption Emotion and Satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = 0.084$, $p = 0.145$). These findings are described in Table 6 and Figure 2. This finding highlights that symbolic branding alone cannot generate emotional gratification without cultural depth and product credibility.

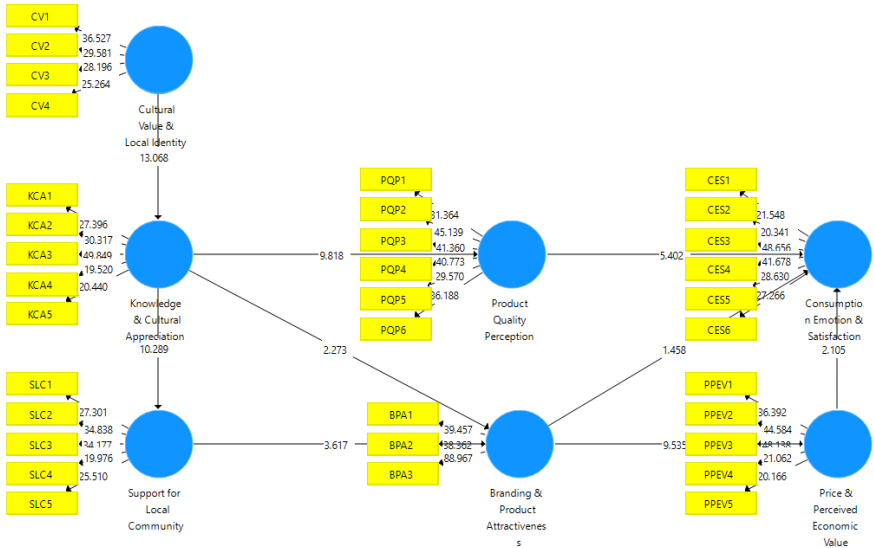


Figure 2. Evaluated Structural Model

Source: Research data, 2025

The figure visualizes the sequential logic of the cultural–cognitive–experiential chain. Cultural value → Knowledge → Quality → Emotion represents the strongest causal flow, empirically validating the cognitive–ethical authenticity framework proposed in this study.

Table 6. Path Coefficient Results

Relationship	β	T-Statistic	p-Value	Result
H1: Cultural Value & Local Identity → Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation	0.624	13.068	0.000	Supported

Relationship	β	T-Statistic	p-Value	Result
H2: Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Branding & Product Attractiveness	0.217	2.273	0.023	Supported
H3: Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Product Quality Perception	0.550	9.818	0.000	Supported
H4: Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Support for Local Community	0.586	10.289	0.000	Supported
H5: Support for Local Community → Branding & Product Attractiveness	0.268	3.617	0.000	Supported
H6: Branding & Product Attractiveness → Price & Perceived Economic Value	0.490	9.535	0.000	Supported
H7: Price & Perceived Economic Value → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.180	2.105	0.036	Supported
H8: Product Quality Perception → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.443	5.402	0.000	Supported
H9: Branding & Product Attractiveness → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.084	1.458	0.145	Not Supported

Note: significance level at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Source: Research data, 2025

Model Explanatory Power (R^2)

The coefficient of determination values demonstrate moderate explanatory power (Table 7). Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction achieved the highest $R^2 = 0.413$, meaning that Product Quality, Price Value, and Branding explain 41.3 % of its variance. Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation ($R^2 = 0.389$) was strongly predicted by Cultural Value & Local Identity, emphasising that cultural immersion precedes cognitive understanding.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Branding & Product Attractiveness	0.187	0.182	Weak to Moderate
Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.413	0.408	Moderate
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation	0.389	0.387	Moderate
Price & Perceived Economic Value	0.240	0.238	Weak to Moderate
Product Quality Perception	0.302	0.300	Moderate
Support for Local Community	0.344	0.341	Moderate

Source: Research data, 2025

R^2 patterns show that satisfaction and ethical support are cognition-driven rather than aesthetics-driven—evidence that meaning precedes emotion in gastronomic experience.

Effect Size (f^2)

Effect-size analysis (Table 8) clarifies which relationships exert the greatest influence. Cultural value → Knowledge & Appreciation ($f^2 = 0.637$) had the largest effect, proving that food heritage powerfully enhances cultural understanding. Knowledge & appreciation also showed large effects on Product Quality Perception ($f^2 = 0.434$) and Support for Local Community ($f^2 = 0.523$). Branding → Price & Value had a large effect ($f^2 = 0.316$), while Product Quality → Satisfaction produced a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.119$).

Table 8. Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	f^2	Effect Size
Branding & Product Attractiveness → Price & Perceived Economic Value	0.316	Large
Branding & Product Attractiveness → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.009	Small
Cultural Value & Local Identity → Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation	0.637	Large
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Branding & Product Attractiveness	0.038	Small
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Product Quality Perception	0.434	Large
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation → Support for Local Community	0.523	Large
Price & Perceived Economic Value → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.019	Small
Product Quality Perception → Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	0.119	Medium
Support for Local Community → Branding & Product Attractiveness	0.058	Small

Source: Research data, 2025

Cultural and cognitive variables dominate the explanatory hierarchy, with branding operating as a derivative amplifier rather than a primary driver.

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

All endogenous constructs produced positive Q^2 values, confirming predictive validity (Table 9). Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction recorded $Q^2 = 0.271$ (medium), followed by Knowledge & Cultural

Appreciation (0.246) and Support for Local Community (0.219). Branding & Product Attractiveness showed a Q^2 value of 0.142, which is the lowest yet still positive, implying an acceptable prediction given its dependence on external marketing cues.

Table 9. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Construct	SSO	SSE	Q^2	Predictive Relevance
Branding & Product Attractiveness	957.000	820.907	0.142	Small
Consumption Emotion & Satisfaction	1.914.000	1.395.491	0.271	Medium
Knowledge & Cultural Appreciation	1.595.000	1.203.260	0.246	Medium
Price & Perceived Economic Value	1.595.000	1.350.777	0.153	Small
Product Quality Perception	1.914.000	1.541.030	0.195	Small to Medium
Support for Local Community	1.595.000	1.245.241	0.219	Medium

Source: Research data, 2025

The model reliably predicts emotional and evaluative outcomes, demonstrating that tourists' responses to local food are grounded in cognitive and ethical engagement rather than superficial stimuli.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that cultural cognition rather than symbolic branding drives tourists' evaluative and emotional responses to local food. The significant paths from cultural value and local identity to knowledge appreciation, and from knowledge to both quality perception and community support, confirm that gastronomic experience is a form of cultural learning rather than a market exchange. This pattern resonates with consumer-culture theory, which views consumption as identity negotiation (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bourdieu, 1984). Yet, unlike earlier works that treat authenticity as a static attribute or aesthetic marker, this study reveals that authenticity is cognitive and ethical—it operates through tourists' interpretive reasoning and moral engagement with local heritage.

The non-significant effect of branding on satisfaction exposes a critical tension within mainstream tourism marketing. Even culturally themed branding fails to evoke emotional resonance unless it is mediated by perceived quality and ethical connection. This finding contradicts the conventional destination-branding model, which assumes that visual imagery alone produces satisfaction and loyalty (Pike & Page, 2014). The present evidence suggests that cultural literacy has become the new brand equity. Tourists are not emotionally moved by logos or packaging but by stories that translate heritage into sensory and moral credibility. Emotional satisfaction thus stems from cognitive authenticity, not aesthetic simulation.

The strong effects of knowledge appreciation on product quality perception and support for local communities advance the notion of responsible hedonism in food tourism. Tourists derive pleasure not only from taste but also from the moral comfort of contributing to community well-being. This dual mechanism integrates the logic of experiential consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) with the ethics of care in sustainable tourism (Goodwin, 2017). Pleasure and purpose, taste and conscience, reinforce one another, producing an affective response that is both sensorially gratifying and ethically grounded. In this sense, the tourist's emotional engagement represents a synthesis of learning and caring.

Theoretically, these results challenge the instrumentalist logic that dominates gastronomic branding research. Rather than viewing branding as the engine of emotion, the data support a culture-centred interpretation in which meaning, not image, drives satisfaction. This aligns with current debates on transformative tourism, which conceptualise cultural participation as a moral economy (Cohen & Cohen, 2019). Emotion here is not a by-product of marketing aesthetics but a moral consequence of cultural understanding.

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends the theorisation of cultural consumption in gastronomic tourism in three ways. First, it repositions cultural value and local identity as epistemic antecedents rather than decorative attributes. Previous studies tend to frame authenticity as a promotional device, whereas this research shows that cultural identity generates knowledge—it produces interpretive engagement that shapes perceptions of quality, ethics, and belonging. Cultural meaning thus precedes and structures satisfaction. Second, the study bridges cultural identity theory and consumer-experience models by introducing the concept of cognitive–ethical authenticity. Emotional satisfaction arises when sensory pleasure converges with moral justification, when tourists feel both delighted and right. This synthesis connects the aesthetics of experience with the ethics of participation, advancing a new model of responsible hedonism in contemporary tourism.

Third, the findings invert the causal logic of branding. The insignificant effect of branding on satisfaction suggests that branding functions as a cultural outcome rather than a causal driver. Culture does not serve branding; branding serves culture. By demonstrating that perceived quality, ethical resonance, and knowledge appreciation—not surface-level aesthetics—generate emotional engagement, this study reframes destination marketing as a process of meaning articulation rather than symbolic manipulation. Taken together, these insights outline a cognitive–ethical authenticity framework that situates gastronomic satisfaction within the intersection of cultural cognition, ethical sensibility, and experiential pleasure. This perspective invites future studies to conceptualise tourism not as a commercial system but as a cognitive–moral ecology in which meaning, virtue, and pleasure interact dynamically.

Managerial Implications

The results underscore the need to shift from aesthetic branding toward interpretive experience design. Tourists are not persuaded by visual cues alone; they are emotionally moved when they understand the stories, people, and values behind the food. Managers should therefore design food experiences as learning encounters that foster dialogue and reflection. Menus, guided tastings, and culinary storytelling can function as narrative platforms that communicate origin, craftsmanship, and community contribution. Authenticity should be performed as pedagogy rather than spectacle—an invitation to understanding rather than imitation.

Another implication concerns community alignment. Branding strategies must embed visible social benefits such as fair trade, local sourcing, and employment generation. When tourists perceive that their spending sustains livelihoods, satisfaction is amplified through moral fulfilment. Community well-being thus becomes a component of brand equity rather than a peripheral act of responsibility. Equally important, managers should treat quality, transparency, and coherence as the foundations of affective value. The evidence shows that branding without perceived quality fails to generate emotion; trust and authenticity are inseparable.

Finally, digital engagement should evolve from persuasion to cultural mediation. Online platforms can serve as spaces where chefs, artisans, and local producers share narratives that extend the sensory and ethical experience beyond the physical visit. Branding, in this view, becomes a continuous cultural conversation rather than a marketing campaign. The task for destination managers is to transform gastronomy into a medium of communication—one that links taste with ethics, producers with travellers, and local identity with global understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that tourists' satisfaction with local food experiences is cognitively and ethically constructed rather than aesthetically induced. The findings reveal a coherent chain of influence: cultural identity fosters knowledge appreciation, knowledge heightens perceptions of quality and social responsibility, and together these generate emotional fulfilment and satisfaction. Gastronomic pleasure thus emerges not from symbolic consumption but from cognitive engagement and ethical resonance. Theoretically, this research reframes gastronomic tourism as a cognitive–ethical system that unites cultural identity theory with consumer experience models. It advances the concept of cognitive–ethical authenticity, showing that satisfaction arises when sensory pleasure converges with moral understanding. This framework challenges brand-essentialist assumptions that equate visual aesthetics with emotional impact, positioning cultural literacy—not brand imagery—as the true source of experiential value. By foregrounding cognition and ethics, the study extends consumer-culture theory toward a more reflexive understanding of authenticity as an interpretive act.

Practically, the findings encourage destination managers and culinary entrepreneurs to design interpretive, community-aligned, and quality-driven experiences. Branding should communicate authenticity through narratives of origin, transparency, and mutual benefit. When tourists learn from and empathise with the people behind the cuisine, satisfaction becomes both affective and moral, transforming gastronomy into a medium of sustainable place-making and social connection. Certain limitations temper these contributions. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the study's focus on Indonesian destinations constrains generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal or cross-cultural approaches to examine how cognitive–ethical authenticity evolves across time and culinary systems. Qualitative inquiry could also illuminate how moral reasoning and emotion intertwine in tourists' decision-making. Ultimately, this study positions local food not merely as a consumable product but as a moral and epistemic bridge between visitors and communities. When rooted in cultural meaning and ethical engagement, gastronomy becomes an act of both pleasure and respect—an everyday expression of how understanding can sustain experience.

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