

A PLS-SEM Analysis of Perceived Authenticity as a Mediator between Taste, Health, and Price Value and Tourist Attitude toward Local Food

**Azmen Kahar¹, Ridho Ryswaldi², Ranggi Rahimul Insan¹, Hermansyah^{1,*}, Khairani Saladin¹,
Vischa Mansyera Pratama¹, Yuke Permata Lisna¹, Feriantano Sundang Pranata¹,
Retnaningtyas Susanti¹, Heriani³**

¹*Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia*

²*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia*

³*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia*

**Corresponding author: hermansyah@fpp.unp.ac.id*

ABSTRACT. Local gastronomy is no longer a peripheral attraction in destination marketing; it increasingly shapes how tourists judge the distinctiveness and competitiveness of a place. However, the mechanism through which tourists' value perceptions translate into favourable attitudes toward local food remains underexplored, particularly in culinary destinations where food is closely tied to place identity and cultural meaning. This study examines how taste value, health value, and price value influence tourist attitude toward local food, both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity. Data were collected from 283 tourists visiting culinary destinations in West Sumatra, Indonesia, and analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings show that taste value positively affects both perceived authenticity and tourist attitude. Health value and price value significantly strengthen perceived authenticity, although price value does not directly shape tourist attitude. Perceived authenticity is the most influential predictor of tourist attitude and mediates the effects of taste value, health value, and price value. These results indicate that tourists do not evaluate local food solely through functional benefits such as flavour, healthiness, or affordability. Rather, these values become meaningful when they support a stronger perception that the food is authentic, culturally rooted, and representative of the destination. The study contributes to Consumer Value Theory by positioning perceived authenticity as a central interpretive mechanism linking food-related value perceptions with tourist attitude in culinary tourism.

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1. Introduction

Local gastronomy has moved from a supporting element of tourism to a strategic resource in destination positioning. It contributes not only to destination image but also to the way tourists encounter, remember, and evaluate a place [1], [2], [3]. In culinary tourism, local food is not judged merely as a product for consumption. It also carries meanings of place, cultural continuity, and local identity. For this reason, tourists tend to evaluate local food through multiple value dimensions, particularly taste, health, and price, before forming an overall attitude toward the food experience [4], [5], [6]. However, the way these value perceptions become translated into favourable attitudes remains insufficiently explained, especially in destinations where food is closely embedded in cultural and regional identity.

Previous studies have examined food-related value mainly through separate attributes, such as sensory appeal, health considerations, or price fairness [7], [8], [9]. Taste value is commonly associated with enjoyment, sensory pleasure, and satisfaction, while health value has become more relevant as tourists pay closer attention to hygiene, freshness, nutrition, and well-being in food consumption [4], [10], [11]. Price value is also important because tourists often compare the cost of local food with the quality, portion, uniqueness, and overall experience they receive [6], [12]. Yet these dimensions may not influence attitude in the same way. In particular, price-related evaluation does not always generate a favourable attitude directly. A food experience may be considered reasonably priced, but this does not necessarily mean that tourists will develop a stronger positive attitude toward the food unless the experience also carries cultural meaning, distinctiveness, or authenticity. This suggests that the relationship between value perception and tourist attitude requires a more interpretive explanation than a direct attribute-attitude logic.

Perceived authenticity provides a relevant mechanism for explaining this process. In culinary tourism, authenticity refers to the extent to which local food is perceived as genuine, culturally rooted, and representative of local traditions [13], [14], [15]. Authenticity can strengthen tourists' emotional attachment to food because it allows them to see the food experience as more than a matter of taste, nutrition, or affordability. Prior studies have shown that authenticity is associated with satisfaction, positive attitude, loyalty, and revisit intention [16], [17], [18]. Nevertheless, authenticity should not be treated only as a descriptive feature of local food. It may also operate as an interpretive bridge through which tourists assign meaning to taste, health, and price cues. For example, distinctive flavour may signal traditional preparation, freshness may reinforce trust in local ingredients, and reasonable price may be interpreted more positively when the food is perceived as genuinely local. Despite this potential role, limited empirical work has examined taste value, health value, and price value

simultaneously within a mediation model that places perceived authenticity between food-related value perceptions and tourist attitude [4], [11], [19].

This study responds to that gap by developing and testing an integrated structural model in which taste value, health value, and price value are specified as exogenous constructs, perceived authenticity as a mediator, and tourist attitude as the endogenous construct [10], [12], [20]. The model is grounded in Consumer Value Theory and supported by Expectancy-Value Theory, both of which explain how individuals form evaluative responses based on perceived benefits, beliefs, and expected outcomes [21], [22], [23]. Using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), this study examines not only the direct effects of taste, health, and price value on tourist attitude but also their indirect effects through perceived authenticity [24], [25].

The contribution of this study lies in three specific areas. First, it integrates taste value, health value, and price value into a single model of tourist evaluation of local food, rather than treating them as isolated attributes. Second, it positions perceived authenticity as a mediating mechanism that explains why certain value perceptions become more influential in shaping attitude. Third, it clarifies that food-related value dimensions do not necessarily follow identical pathways; some may influence attitude directly, while others may depend more strongly on authenticity-based interpretation. The empirical setting of West Sumatra, Indonesia, is particularly relevant because the region's cuisine is strongly associated with cultural identity, traditional preparation, and destination image. By focusing on this context, the study offers a more grounded explanation of how tourists form attitudes toward local food in a culturally distinctive culinary destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Consumer Value Theory (CVT)*

Consumer Value Theory (CVT) is used in this study to explain how tourists evaluate local food by weighing the benefits they perceive against the sacrifices involved in obtaining the experience [26], [27], [28]. In tourism and hospitality, value is rarely assessed in purely functional terms because tourists often judge consumption experiences through sensory pleasure, perceived quality, cultural fit, emotional meaning, and overall worth. This perspective is especially relevant in culinary tourism, where local food is consumed not merely to satisfy hunger but also to encounter the destination through its cultural and gastronomic identity. Within this framework, taste value, health value, and price value represent key cognitive evaluations of the local food experience [4], [12]. Taste value captures sensory enjoyment; health value reflects perceptions of safety, freshness, nutrition, and well-being; while price value concerns whether the food is considered worth the money paid. However, these evaluations do not automatically produce favourable attitudes. A dish may be enjoyable, healthy, or reasonably priced, yet tourists may

respond more positively when these attributes are interpreted as part of a genuine local culinary experience. This argument is consistent with Expectancy-Value Theory, which suggests that attitudes are formed when individuals believe that an object or experience can deliver outcomes they consider valuable [29], [30]. In this study, taste value, health value, and price value are therefore treated as cognitive value evaluations, while perceived authenticity is positioned as the interpretive mechanism through which those evaluations gain stronger attitudinal relevance.

2.2. *Taste Value*

Taste value is one of the most immediate and influential dimensions in food evaluation because it is experienced directly through flavour, aroma, texture, and overall palatability [31], [32]. In culinary tourism, taste carries more than sensory importance because local food often becomes one of the most memorable ways tourists encounter a destination, particularly when its flavour profile differs from everyday food experiences [33]. A pleasurable and distinctive taste can shape tourist attitude directly by generating enjoyment, satisfaction, and a positive impression of the local food experience [34]. At the same time, taste may also work through an interpretive route. Tourists often use taste as a cue to judge whether food feels genuinely local; traditional seasoning, preparation methods, and distinctive flavour may signal that the food is rooted in local culinary practice rather than being a generic product adapted for visitors. Previous studies suggest that sensory satisfaction can reinforce perceptions that food is distinctive, memorable, and representative of local tradition [35]. Thus, the significance of taste lies not only in whether tourists enjoy the food, but also in whether the taste helps them recognise the cultural character of the dish. Based on this reasoning, taste value is expected to influence tourist attitude both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Taste value has a positive effect on perceived authenticity of local food.

H2: Taste value has a positive direct effect on tourist attitude toward local food.

2.3. *Health Value*

Health value has become an increasingly important consideration in food consumption, particularly as tourists have become more attentive to hygiene, freshness, nutrition, and food safety [36], [37]. In the context of local food, health value refers to the extent to which tourists perceive the food as safe to consume, prepared with fresh ingredients, and compatible with their concern for well-being. This issue becomes especially relevant when tourists encounter unfamiliar dishes, because they must evaluate not only taste but also the quality and safety of what they consume. Health value may also strengthen perceptions of authenticity because, in many culinary settings, food that is fresh, naturally prepared, and minimally processed is often associated with traditional cooking and local ingredients. Previous studies indicate that health-related evaluations can support perceptions that food is natural, trustworthy, and prepared in a

credible manner [38], [39]. For tourists, these qualities may signal that the food is not merely a commercialised product, but part of a local culinary tradition that has retained its original character. Unlike taste value, health value may not always shape tourist attitude directly; tourists may appreciate that a local dish is fresh or safe, but this evaluation becomes more meaningful when it reinforces the perception that the food is genuine and culturally grounded. Therefore, this study argues that health value is more likely to influence tourist attitude indirectly through perceived authenticity. On this basis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Health value has a positive effect on perceived authenticity of local food.

2.4. Price Value

Price value is an important element of tourist evaluation because it reflects tourists' judgement of whether the price paid is reasonable in relation to the quality, portion, uniqueness, and overall experience received [40], [41], [42]. In culinary tourism, price is not evaluated only in monetary terms, as tourists also consider whether the food is worth paying for when compared with the cultural experience, local distinctiveness, and satisfaction it provides. A dish may be inexpensive, but if it lacks quality or cultural appeal, tourists may not necessarily develop a favourable attitude toward it. The role of price value in shaping tourist response is therefore more complex than a simple assumption that lower price automatically leads to a better attitude. Some studies report that price fairness can directly influence behavioural responses in food-related contexts [43], whereas others suggest that price works more indirectly by shaping perceptions of quality, credibility, and fit between the product and the experience offered [44]. These mixed findings indicate that price value may depend on how tourists interpret the price within the broader context of the food experience. In local gastronomy, fair pricing can support perceived authenticity when tourists feel that the price is consistent with the cultural value, preparation process, and uniqueness of the dish. Reasonable pricing may also signal honesty and integrity, especially when tourists perceive that they are paying for a genuine local experience rather than an overpriced tourist product. Because price value may generate both direct and indirect evaluations, this study examines its direct effect on tourist attitude as well as its indirect effect through perceived authenticity. On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Price value has a positive effect on perceived authenticity of local food.

H5: Price value has a positive direct effect on tourist attitude toward local food.

2.5. Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to tourists' judgement that local food is genuine, traditional, and embedded in the culture from which it originates [14], [45]. In culinary tourism, authenticity matters because food often functions as a tangible expression of place. Tourists may not only ask whether the food tastes good, but also whether it reflects local ingredients, traditional preparation, cultural meaning, and the identity of the destination. When food is perceived as

authentic, the dining experience becomes more than a routine act of consumption; it becomes part of how tourists understand and remember the destination. Previous studies have shown that authenticity strengthens satisfaction, destination image, loyalty, and revisit intention [16], [46]. However, in this study, authenticity is not treated merely as another positive attribute of local food, but as a mechanism that explains how value perceptions become meaningful. Tourists may respond positively to local food not simply because it is delicious, healthy, or fairly priced, but because these attributes support the belief that the food genuinely represents local culinary traditions. This mediating role is important because taste, health, and price may not influence attitude through identical pathways. Taste may directly create a favourable attitude, while health and price may require authenticity-based interpretation before they become attitudinally influential. In this sense, perceived authenticity connects cognitive value judgements with tourists' overall evaluation of local food. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

H6: Perceived authenticity has a positive effect on tourist attitude toward local food.

H7a: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between taste value and tourist attitude.

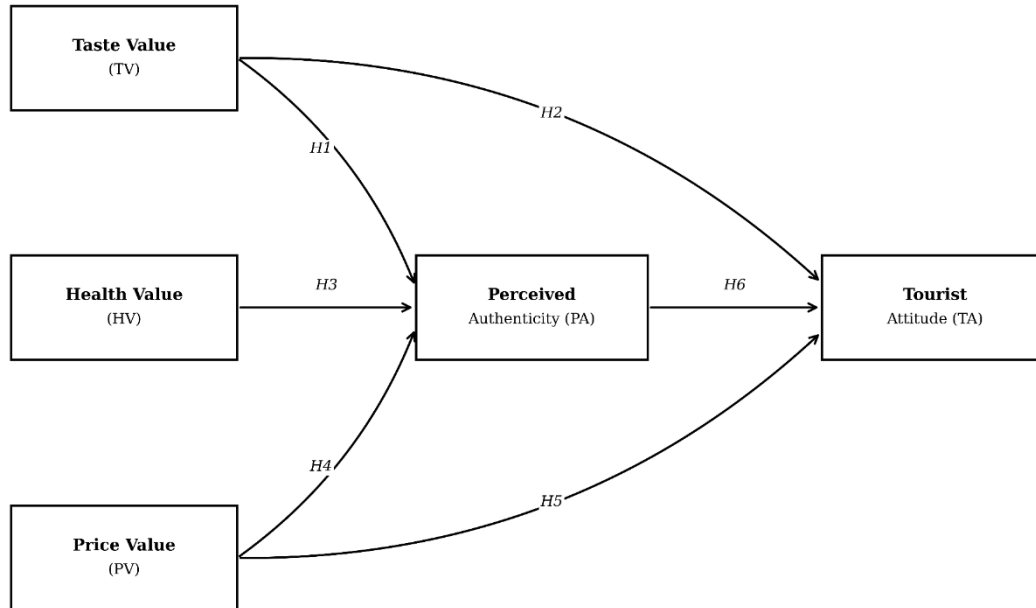
H7b: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between health value and tourist attitude.

H7c: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between price value and tourist attitude.

2.6. *Tourist Attitude*

Tourist attitude refers to tourists' overall evaluative orientation toward a local food experience, whether favourable or unfavourable [10], [12], [47]. In tourism research, attitude is important because it often precedes behavioural intention, including revisit intention, recommendation, positive word of mouth, and loyalty [48], [49]. In culinary tourism, attitude toward local food can also influence how tourists evaluate the destination more broadly because a positive food experience may strengthen the impression that a destination is distinctive, memorable, and culturally rich. For this reason, tourist attitude is treated in this study as the principal endogenous construct. The study examines how attitude is shaped by taste value, health value, price value, and perceived authenticity. This positioning allows the model to capture not only whether tourists evaluate local food positively, but also why certain value dimensions become more influential than others. In particular, the model recognises that tourists' attitudes toward local food are formed through both direct value evaluation and authenticity-based interpretation. Taken together, the constructs in this study provide an integrated framework for explaining how cognitive value perceptions shape tourist attitude toward local food. Taste value, health value, and price value represent tourists' evaluation of the food experience, while perceived authenticity explains how those evaluations acquire cultural and attitudinal meaning.

The proposed conceptual framework and associated hypotheses are presented in Figure 1, where H7a, H7b, and H7c represent the mediating effects of perceived authenticity on the relationships between taste value, health value, and price value and tourist attitude.



Note: H7a, H7b, and H7c represent the mediating effects of perceived authenticity on the relationships between taste value, health value, and price value and tourist attitude.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework of the relationships among taste value, health value, price value, perceived authenticity, and tourist attitude.

3. Methods

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine how taste value, health value, price value, perceived authenticity, and tourist attitude are related in the context of culinary tourism. This design was appropriate because the study sought to capture tourists' evaluations of local food at a specific point in time and to test the relationships among latent constructs using standardised measurement items. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first part explained the purpose of the study, requested informed consent, and assured respondents that their answers would remain confidential and would be reported only in aggregate form. The second part gathered demographic information, including gender, age, education, monthly income, and travel experience. The third part measured the five research constructs using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "strongly disagree," to 5, "strongly agree." In line with the measurement model presented in Table 1, taste value, health value, and price value were each measured using three items, perceived authenticity using four items, and tourist attitude using three items. Before the

main survey, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 respondents to assess the clarity and readability of the items. Minor wording adjustments were made based on their feedback to reduce ambiguity and improve respondent comprehension.

3.1. *Sample and Procedure*

The target respondents were domestic and international tourists who had consumed local food during their visit to West Sumatra, Indonesia. West Sumatra was selected because its major destinations, including Padang, Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh, and Pariaman, are strongly associated with Minangkabau cuisine, making the region a relevant setting for examining how tourists interpret taste, health, price, and authenticity in local food consumption. Respondents were included only if they had direct experience of consuming local food during their visit, since the study required evaluations based on actual consumption rather than general perceptions. Data were collected over a four-week period through both offline and online distribution. Offline questionnaires were distributed at selected culinary tourism sites, while the online survey was circulated through social media platforms and culinary travel communities. The sampling strategy combined purposive and convenience sampling: purposive sampling ensured that respondents met the study criteria, while convenience sampling reflected the practical accessibility of tourists during the data collection period. A total of 287 questionnaires were returned. After data screening, four responses were removed because they failed the attention-check item, resulting in 283 valid responses for analysis. Considering the prediction-oriented nature of PLS-SEM and the number of constructs and paths in the model, this sample size was considered adequate. However, because the sample was obtained through a non-probability procedure, the findings should be interpreted within the culinary tourism context studied and should not be treated as evidence for broad statistical generalisation.

3.2. *Common Method Bias*

Because all data were collected through self-reported questionnaires from the same respondents at a single point in time, common method bias was addressed at both the design and statistical stages. Procedurally, the questionnaire assured anonymity, reduced evaluation apprehension by stating that there were no right or wrong answers, and used clear wording to minimise misinterpretation. An attention-check item was also included to identify inattentive responses. Statistically, common method bias was assessed using the full collinearity approach. Following Kock's recommendation, variance inflation factor values above 3.3 may indicate pathological collinearity and a potential common method bias problem, while values below this threshold suggest that such bias is unlikely to distort the results. In this study, the inner VIF values ranged from 1.331 to 1.535, which are well below the 3.3 threshold. These results indicate that common method bias was not a major concern in the dataset.

3.3. *Data Analysis*

The data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 3. PLS-SEM was selected because the study focused on prediction and on testing a mediation model involving several latent constructs measured by multiple indicators. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and collinearity. Second, the structural model was examined to test the proposed hypotheses, including the direct effects of taste value, health value, price value, and perceived authenticity on tourist attitude, as well as the indirect effects operating through perceived authenticity. Statistical significance was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. Prior to the main analysis, the dataset was screened using the attention-check item, which led to the exclusion of four questionnaires and produced a final sample of 283 valid responses.

3.4. *Measurement Validation*

The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity. As reported in Table 1, all outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.786 to 0.865, which indicates adequate indicator reliability. Internal consistency was also acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.861 to 0.902 and composite reliability values ranging from 0.902 to 0.936, both above the recommended minimum of 0.70. Convergent validity was established because the average variance extracted values for all constructs exceeded 0.50, ranging from 0.644 to 0.713. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. As shown in Table 2, the square root of the AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT values in Table 3 ranged from 0.512 to 0.718 and remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85, with the highest value observed between perceived authenticity and tourist attitude. These results confirm that the constructs were empirically distinct. Collinearity was then assessed using variance inflation factor values. As shown in Table 4, the inner VIF values ranged from 1.331 to 1.535, which are below both the standard threshold of 5.0 and the more conservative 3.3 threshold commonly used in common method bias assessment. The outer VIF values were also within acceptable limits. Overall, the measurement model met the required standards for reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and collinearity diagnostics, supporting its use for subsequent structural model evaluation.

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Taste Value	TV1	0.812	0.894	0.927	0.667
	TV2	0.806			
	TV3	0.831			
Health Value	HV1	0.845	0.867	0.915	0.658
	HV2	0.802			
	HV3	0.786			
Price Value	PV1	0.804	0.861	0.902	0.644
	PV2	0.794			
	PV3	0.809			
Perceived Authenticity	PA1	0.823	0.902	0.936	0.713
	PA2	0.846			
	PA3	0.865			
	PA4	0.842			
Tourist Attitude	ATT1	0.811	0.876	0.920	0.668
	ATT2	0.833			
	ATT3	0.807			

Table 2. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Taste Value	Health Value	Price Value	Perceived Authenticity	Tourist Attitude
Taste Value (TV)	0.816				
Health Value (HV)	0.462	0.811			
Price Value (PV)	0.438	0.414	0.802		
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	0.532	0.487	0.463	0.844	
Tourist Attitude (TA)	0.504	0.473	0.439	0.597	0.817

Table 3. Discriminant Validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	Taste Value	Health Value	Price Value	Perceived Authenticity	Tourist Attitude
Taste Value (TV)					
Health Value (HV)	0.561				
Price Value (PV)	0.534	0.512			
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	0.652	0.601	0.574		
Tourist Attitude (TA)	0.683	0.627	0.593	0.718	

Table 4. Collinearity Assessment (VIF)

Endogenous Construct	Predictor	Inner VIF	Outer VIF (Range)
Perceived Authenticity	Taste Value	1.402	2.85–3.23
Perceived Authenticity	Health Value	1.368	2.62–3.50
Perceived Authenticity	Price Value	1.331	2.71–2.89
Tourist Attitude	Taste Value	1.492	2.85–3.23
Tourist Attitude	Price Value	1.362	2.71–2.89
Tourist Attitude	Perceived Authenticity	1.535	3.10–3.97

4. Results

4.1. Sample Characteristics

Table 5 presents the demographic profile of the 283 respondents included in the final analysis. The sample was dominated by female respondents, who accounted for 62.5% of the total, while male respondents represented 37.5%. Most respondents were relatively young, with the largest proportion aged 25–34 years (42.0%), followed by those under 25 years old (28.6%). This profile suggests that the study mainly captured the evaluations of younger culinary tourists, a segment that is often active in exploring local food experiences and sharing travel-related consumption through social and digital networks. In terms of visit experience, 61.5% were first-time visitors and 38.5% were repeat visitors, indicating that the data reflected both initial and more familiar encounters with West Sumatran culinary destinations. The social nature of culinary tourism was also visible in the travel pattern, as most respondents travelled with family (41.0%) or with friends/groups (32.9%), while only 16.3% travelled alone. Regarding geographic origin, 42.4% of respondents came from West Sumatra, 29.3% from other provinces in Sumatra, and 19.4% from Java, with the remaining 8.8% from other islands. Overall, the sample provides a reasonably varied respondent profile in terms of gender, age, visit experience, travel companion, and regional origin, although the dominance of younger and family/group travellers should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Table 5. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n = 283)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	106	37.5
	Female	177	62.5
Age Group	< 25 years	81	28.6
	25–34 years	119	42.0
	35–44 years	53	18.7
	≥ 45 years	30	10.6
Visit Experience	First-time visitor	174	61.5
	Repeat visitor	109	38.5
Travel Companion	Solo	46	16.3
	Family	116	41.0
	Friends/Group	93	32.9
	Organised tour	28	9.9
Origin	West Sumatra	120	42.4
	Other provinces in Sumatra	83	29.3
	Java	55	19.4
	Other islands (Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua)	25	8.8

4.2. *Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing*

The structural model was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS based on the 283 valid responses retained after data screening. Statistical significance was evaluated using the criteria of $p < 0.05$ and $t > 1.96$. As shown in Table 6, taste value had a positive and significant effect on perceived authenticity (H1: $\beta = 0.312$, $t = 4.394$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that tourists who perceived local food as flavourful, enjoyable, and sensorially appealing were more likely to regard it as authentic. Taste value also had a significant direct effect on tourist attitude (H2: $\beta = 0.158$, $t = 2.394$, $p = 0.017$), although the coefficient was smaller than the effect of perceived authenticity. This result suggests that taste matters not only as a sensory response but also as a cue through which tourists recognise the cultural character of local food. Health value also significantly influenced perceived authenticity (H3: $\beta = 0.274$, $t = 3.971$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that perceptions of freshness, hygiene, safety, and healthfulness can strengthen tourists' belief that local food is credible and genuinely rooted in local culinary practice. Price value showed a positive effect on perceived authenticity as well (H4: $\beta = 0.226$, $t = 3.096$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that fair and reasonable pricing may support tourists' perception that the food experience is honest and consistent with the cultural value offered.

By contrast, the direct effect of price value on tourist attitude was not statistically significant (H5: $\beta = 0.092$, $t = 1.460$, $p = 0.145$). This result is important because it shows that reasonable price alone does not necessarily produce a favourable attitude toward local food. In the context of culinary tourism, tourists may appreciate value for money, but price becomes attitudinally meaningful only when it reinforces a broader sense of authenticity and cultural worth. Among all direct paths estimated in the model, perceived authenticity had the strongest effect on tourist attitude (H6: $\beta = 0.482$, $t = 7.415$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that tourists' favourable attitudes toward local food are shaped more strongly by whether the food is perceived as genuine, culturally grounded, and representative of the destination than by functional evaluations alone.

The mediation results further clarify the role of perceived authenticity. Perceived authenticity significantly mediated the relationship between taste value and tourist attitude (H7a: $\beta = 0.151$, $t = 3.146$, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI [0.058, 0.244]), health value and tourist attitude (H7b: $\beta = 0.132$, $t = 2.870$, $p = 0.004$, 95% CI [0.041, 0.223]), and price value and tourist attitude (H7c: $\beta = 0.109$, $t = 2.535$, $p = 0.011$, 95% CI [0.026, 0.192]). These results show that taste, health, and price values do not operate in identical ways. Taste value influences attitude both directly and indirectly, while price value becomes influential mainly through authenticity-based interpretation. Health value also contributes to tourist attitude indirectly by strengthening perceived authenticity. Taken together, H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7a, H7b, and H7c were supported, whereas H5 was not supported.

The model also demonstrated acceptable explanatory power. As reported in Table 7, taste value, health value, and price value explained 40.4% of the variance in perceived authenticity ($R^2 = 0.404$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.398$). Taste value, price value, and perceived authenticity explained 40.8% of the variance in tourist attitude ($R^2 = 0.408$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.401$). The effect size results provide additional insight into the relative importance of each path. Perceived authenticity had a large effect on tourist attitude ($f^2 = 0.486$), confirming its dominant explanatory role in the model. The effects of taste value ($f^2 = 0.279$), health value ($f^2 = 0.224$), and price value ($f^2 = 0.176$) on perceived authenticity were moderate, suggesting that all three value dimensions meaningfully contribute to authenticity perception. In contrast, the direct effects of taste value on tourist attitude ($f^2 = 0.134$) and price value on tourist attitude ($f^2 = 0.068$) were small. The Q^2 values for perceived authenticity and tourist attitude were above zero, indicating that the model had predictive relevance. Overall, the results support the argument that tourist attitude toward local food is formed not merely through functional value assessment, but through the extent to which those values strengthen the perception of authenticity.

Table 6. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	β	M	STDEV	t	p	95% CI	Decision
H1: TV → PA	0.312	0.309	0.071	4.394	< 0.001	-	Supported
H2: TV → TA	0.158	0.160	0.066	2.394	0.017	-	Supported
H3: HV → PA	0.274	0.271	0.069	3.971	< 0.001	-	Supported
H4: PV → PA	0.226	0.229	0.073	3.096	0.002	-	Supported
H5: PV → TA	0.092	0.089	0.063	1.460	0.145	-	Not supported
H6: PA → TA	0.482	0.480	0.065	7.415	< 0.001	-	Supported
H7a: PA mediates TV → TA	0.151	0.150	0.048	3.146	0.002	[0.058, 0.244]	Supported
H7b: PA mediates HV → TA	0.132	0.129	0.046	2.870	0.004	[0.041, 0.223]	Supported
H7c: PA mediates PV → TA	0.109	0.107	0.043	2.535	0.011	[0.026, 0.192]	Supported

Table 7. Explanatory Power and Effect Size

Endogenous Construct / Path	R^2	Adjusted R^2	f^2	Q^2
Perceived Authenticity	0.404	0.398	-	> 0
Tourist Attitude	0.408	0.401	-	> 0
TV → PA	-	-	0.279	-
HV → PA	-	-	0.224	-
PV → PA	-	-	0.176	-
TV → TA	-	-	0.134	-
PV → TA	-	-	0.068	-
PA → TA	-	-	0.486	-

5. Discussion

The findings clarify how tourists develop favourable attitudes toward local food and, more importantly, show why perceived authenticity becomes central in this process. Taste value had a positive and significant effect on both perceived authenticity and tourist attitude, confirming that sensory appeal remains a fundamental basis of culinary evaluation. This result is in line with previous studies showing that flavour, aroma, and eating enjoyment strongly influence satisfaction in culinary tourism [12], [33], [35]. However, the role of taste in this study goes beyond immediate sensory pleasure. Taste value operates through two pathways. First, enjoyable flavour can directly create a positive response toward local food. Second, taste also carries cultural meaning. When tourists experience local food as distinctive, memorable, and consistent with what they expect from a culturally rooted culinary encounter, taste strengthens the perception that the food is authentic [45], [47], [50]. This explains why taste value affects tourist attitude not only directly but also indirectly through perceived authenticity.

Health value showed a different but equally important pattern. It had a significant positive effect on perceived authenticity, suggesting that tourists increasingly connect freshness, hygiene, nutritional quality, and food safety with food experiences that feel genuine and trustworthy. This finding indicates that authenticity is not formed only through traditional recipes, cultural symbols, or local presentation. It is also shaped by whether tourists perceive the food as credible, clean, fresh, and responsibly prepared. This result supports previous research showing that healthy food attributes strengthen trust and encourage favourable post-consumption responses, particularly among younger and more health-conscious travellers [36], [37], [38], [39]. In this study, health value was not positioned as a direct predictor of tourist attitude. The empirical pattern suggests that health-related evaluation becomes more influential when it reinforces the belief that the food is authentic and culturally grounded. In other words, health value matters not simply because tourists want healthy food, but because freshness, safety, and natural preparation can make local food appear more legitimate and trustworthy.

Price value also produced an important finding. Although it significantly influenced perceived authenticity, its direct effect on tourist attitude was not significant. This means that reasonable price alone is not enough to create a favourable attitude toward local food. Tourists may consider a dish affordable or fairly priced, but this does not automatically make them evaluate the food more positively. In culinary tourism, price becomes more meaningful when it is perceived as consistent with the cultural value, quality, and experience offered by the food. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that price often works as a cognitive judgement rather than an immediate emotional driver in food consumption [41], [42], [43]. The non-significant direct effect of price value should therefore not be treated as a weak result. Instead, it shows that price needs to be interpreted within the broader food experience. Fair pricing becomes

attitudinally relevant when it supports the perception that the food is honest, credible, and not merely commercialised for tourists.

Perceived authenticity was the strongest predictor of tourist attitude and showed a large effect size. This finding confirms that authenticity is not only an attractive attribute of local food, but a key interpretive mechanism in culinary tourism. Tourists do not evaluate local food only by asking whether it tastes good, appears healthy, or is reasonably priced. They also judge whether these qualities make the food feel genuinely connected to local culinary culture. The mediation results strengthen this argument. Perceived authenticity significantly mediated the effects of taste value, health value, and price value on tourist attitude. This finding supports earlier studies that identify authenticity as an important determinant of satisfaction, destination image, and post-consumption evaluation in gastronomic contexts [14], [45], [46], [47]. More importantly, the present study shows that authenticity explains how different value dimensions become meaningful for tourists. Taste, health, and price do not stand alone as separate benefits; they become more persuasive when they strengthen the belief that local food represents the cultural identity of the destination.

Taken together, the findings show that cognitive value perceptions do not influence tourist attitude through a single uniform pathway. Taste value affects attitude both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity, while health value and price value shape attitude mainly through authenticity. The model explained slightly more than 40% of the variance in both perceived authenticity and tourist attitude, indicating that the proposed framework captures a meaningful part of the attitude formation process. The positive Q^2 values further show that the model has predictive relevance for both endogenous constructs. These results suggest that local food is not evaluated only through sensory pleasure, health considerations, or price fairness taken separately. Rather, these value perceptions become more influential when tourists interpret them as evidence that the food is genuine, culturally rooted, and representative of the destination. In this respect, the study extends Consumer Value Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory in culinary tourism by showing that value judgements become attitudinally powerful when they pass through an authenticity-based interpretation [21], [22], [23].

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to culinary tourism literature by refining how Consumer Value Theory explains tourist attitude toward local food. The findings show that taste value, health value, and price value do not operate in the same way. Taste value has both direct and indirect effects on tourist attitude, while health value and price value influence attitude mainly through perceived authenticity. This pattern suggests that cognitive value evaluations are not sufficient to explain attitude formation on their own. Their effect depends on whether tourists interpret those values as part of an authentic local food experience. The study therefore moves beyond a

simple value–attitude explanation and shows that authenticity functions as a mechanism that gives value perceptions cultural and emotional meaning. This is theoretically important because authenticity is often treated as a descriptive quality of local food, whereas the present study positions it as a mediating construct that explains how sensory, health-related, and price-related evaluations become attitudinally relevant. Future research can build on this argument by testing additional boundary conditions, such as food involvement, cultural motivation, novelty-seeking, travel experience, and tourists' familiarity with the destination cuisine.

5.2. *Practical Implications*

The findings offer practical guidance for destination managers, culinary entrepreneurs, and policymakers involved in culinary tourism development. First, perceived authenticity should be treated as a strategic element of local food promotion, not merely as a decorative claim. Culinary providers can strengthen authenticity by maintaining traditional preparation methods, using local ingredients, and explaining the cultural origin of dishes through menu descriptions, storytelling, chef demonstrations, or short digital narratives accessed through QR codes. Second, health-related credibility needs to be integrated into the culinary experience. Tourists may interpret freshness, hygiene, and ingredient quality as signs that local food is trustworthy and genuinely prepared. Clear information about ingredients, visible hygiene practices, and collaboration with reliable local producers can therefore strengthen both confidence and authenticity perception. Third, pricing integrity remains important even though price value did not directly predict tourist attitude. Transparent prices, accurate portion information, and the avoidance of hidden charges can help tourists see the food experience as fair and credible. At the destination level, culinary heritage trails, local food festivals, and digital storytelling campaigns can be used to present regional gastronomy as a culturally meaningful experience rather than merely a food product. Such efforts may strengthen tourists' engagement with local cuisine and support the destination's competitive positioning.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how taste value, health value, and price value shape tourist attitude toward local food, with perceived authenticity positioned as a mediating mechanism. The findings show that taste value influences tourist attitude both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity, whereas health value and price value affect attitude mainly through authenticity. Perceived authenticity emerged as the strongest predictor of tourist attitude, confirming that tourists respond more favourably to local food when they perceive it as genuine, culturally grounded, and representative of the destination. These results indicate that value perceptions do not translate into favourable attitudes in a simple or automatic way. Taste, health, and price become more meaningful when they support the perception that the food carries

authentic local character. The study therefore extends Consumer Value Theory in culinary tourism by showing that authenticity is not merely an attribute attached to local food, but the mechanism through which different value dimensions acquire attitudinal significance. Practically, the findings suggest that culinary tourism stakeholders should strengthen the cultural presentation, health-related credibility, and pricing integrity of local food offerings. Nevertheless, the study has limitations. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation, and its focus on West Sumatra limits the generalisability of the findings to other culinary destinations. Future studies may test the model across different regions, compare domestic and international tourists, and examine additional mediating or moderating variables such as cultural motivation, food involvement, novelty-seeking, and prior experience with local cuisine.

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