

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL CULINARY INNOVATION IN SUPPORTING REGIONAL BRANDING IN GRESIK REGENCY

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| INFO ARTIKEL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | ABSTRAK                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| Diterima: 15 Maret 2026<br>Direvisi: 27 Maret 2026<br>Disetujui: 29 Juni 2026<br>Tersedia Daring: 30 Juli 2026<br><b>Kata Kunci:</b><br><i>Regional branding</i><br><i>Ekonomi Kreatif</i><br><i>Gastronomi</i><br><i>Inovasi Kuliner Lokal</i><br><i>Kabupaten Gresik</i> | <p>Perkembangan pariwisata berbasis pengalaman (<i>experience-based tourism</i>) telah mendorong kuliner lokal menjadi salah satu elemen strategis dalam pembentukan identitas dan citra destinasi. Kabupaten Gresik memiliki beragam produk kuliner khas yang berpotensi dikembangkan sebagai bagian dari strategi regional branding, namun pemanfaatannya masih belum terintegrasi secara optimal dengan pengembangan pariwisata dan ekonomi kreatif daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk inovasi kuliner lokal di Kabupaten Gresik, mengkaji perannya dalam mendukung regional branding, serta merumuskan model pengembangan regional branding berbasis inovasi kuliner lokal. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan strategi studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap pelaku UMKM kuliner, pemerintah daerah, pengelola destinasi wisata, akademisi, dan wisatawan. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan analisis tematik dengan tahapan pengkodean, pengelompokan tema, interpretasi, dan triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa inovasi kuliner lokal berkembang pada empat dimensi utama, yaitu inovasi produk, inovasi proses, inovasi kemasan, dan inovasi pemasaran digital. Temuan lapangan menunjukkan bahwa inovasi tersebut diwujudkan melalui pengembangan produk, penggunaan kemasan yang mengangkat unsur budaya lokal, penerapan standarisasi proses, serta pemanfaatan media sosial dalam promosi kuliner, yang secara bersama-sama menciptakan pengalaman gastronomi dan memperkuat identitas serta citra Kabupaten Gresik sebagai destinasi wisata berbasis budaya dan kuliner. Penelitian ini menghasilkan model konseptual Local Culinary Innovation-Based Regional Branding yang menjelaskan bahwa inovasi kuliner lokal berperan sebagai sumber daya strategis dalam membangun daya saing destinasi dan memperkuat ekonomi kreatif daerah. Temuan penelitian diharapkan menjadi dasar bagi pemerintah daerah dan pelaku UMKM dalam merumuskan strategi pengembangan wisata gastronomi yang berkelanjutan.</p> |

| ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                          |
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| <b>Keywords:</b><br><i>Regional branding</i><br><i>Creative Economy</i><br><i>Gastronomy Tourism</i><br><i>Gresik Regency</i><br><i>Local Culinary Innovation</i> |

*The development of experience-based tourism has driven local culinary offerings to become one of the strategic elements in shaping destination identity and image. Gresik Regency has a variety of distinctive culinary products with the potential to be developed as part of a regional branding strategy, but their utilization has not yet been optimally integrated with regional tourism and creative economy development. This study aims to analyze the forms of local culinary innovation in Gresik Regency, examine its role in supporting regional branding, and formulate a regional branding development model based on local culinary innovation. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study strategy. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observation, and*

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*documentation studies involving culinary MSME actors, local government, tourism destination managers, academics, and tourists. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis with the stages of coding, theme grouping, interpretation, and data triangulation. The results show that local culinary innovation develops across four main dimensions, namely product innovation, process innovation, packaging innovation, and digital marketing innovation. Field findings reveal that this innovation is manifested through product development, the use of packaging that highlights local cultural elements, the application of process standardization, and the utilization of social media in culinary promotion, which together create a gastronomic experience and strengthen the identity and image of Gresik Regency as a culture and culinary based tourism destination. This study produces a conceptual model of Local Culinary Innovation Based Regional Branding which explains that local culinary innovation acts as a strategic resource in building destination competitiveness and strengthening the regional creative economy. The research findings are expected to serve as a basis for local government and MSME actors in formulating sustainable gastronomic tourism development strategies.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the global tourism industry over the past two decades shows a shift from conventional tourism toward experience-based tourism. Modern tourists no longer merely seek destinations that offer physical beauty, but also authentic and meaningful experiences capable of building emotional attachment to local culture. In this context, gastronomy and local culinary offerings become important components in creating a memorable tourism experience. Culinary products are no longer viewed merely as a consumption need, but also as a representation of a region's cultural identity, history, tradition, and local wisdom (UN Tourism, 2024).

A number of studies show that gastronomic tourism can contribute to destination competitiveness through authentic culinary experiences that are able to differentiate a destination, strengthen regional image, increase tourist satisfaction, and encourage repeat visits (Ellis et al., 2018). Local culinary products can even become destination identity symbols that are more easily recognized than other tourist attractions, as seen in the association of *rendang* with West Sumatra, *gudeg* with Yogyakarta, and *pempek* with Palembang (Lie et al., 2025; Lubis et al., 2025). This condition shows that culinary offerings can function as a strategic resource in building a region's identity and reputation.

In the perspective of regional development, regional branding has evolved from merely the use of slogans and logos into a strategic process that encompasses the formation of identity, image, experience, stakeholder participation, and the sustainable building of regional reputation. The success of regional branding depends on a region's ability to identify and develop distinctive, authentic local resources that are difficult for

other regions to imitate (Braun & Clarke, 2023). In this regard, local culinary offerings have strong relevance because they are able to connect local products, community culture, and tourism experience into a destination narrative. Gastronomy generates not only economic value, but also cultural, social, and historical value that can strengthen regional identity (Virto & Arrospide, 2024; UN Tourism, 2024). Therefore, culinary development needs to be directed not only toward increasing product sales, but also toward creating tourism experiences that can strengthen destination image and reputation.

Gresik Regency in East Java Province has great potential to develop gastronomy-based regional branding. In addition to being known as the “City of Santri” and having an important history in the spread of Islam in East Java, Gresik has a culinary wealth that developed from coastal community traditions and trading history. Nasi krawu, pudak, bonggolan, jubung, otak-otak bandeng, and various processed seafood products are distinctive culinary products that represent the history, tradition, and local character of the Gresik community. This potential can be integrated with various cultural and historical attractions, such as the Bandar Girissee heritage area, the tomb of Sunan Giri, the tomb of Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Kampung Kemasan, and various other historical sites. The integration of historical, religious, and culinary tourism has the potential to create a more comprehensive and valuable destination experience for tourists.

Despite this potential, the development of local culinary offerings in Gresik Regency still faces a number of challenges. Local culinary products are mostly still marketed individually by MSME actors and have not been integrated into a shared narrative that consistently represents regional identity. Innovation in products, packaging, digital marketing, and the development of culinary tourism experiences has also not been fully integrated into the regional branding strategy. This condition causes the potential of local culinary offerings as an instrument for shaping the identity and image of Gresik Regency to not yet be optimally utilized.

Studies on regional branding in Indonesia so far have focused more on marketing communication, destination promotion, and the use of digital media, while studies that specifically connect local culinary innovation with regional branding at the regency level are still relatively limited. Likewise, gastronomy studies have focused more on tourist behavior, consumer satisfaction, and culinary product development, while their relationship with the formation of regional identity and destination reputation has not been studied in much depth. This condition shows a research gap that requires a more integrated approach that positions local culinary innovation not only as an economic commodity or tourist attraction, but as a strategic resource in creating gastronomic experiences, strengthening destination identity and image, and increasing regional competitiveness.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework that integrates local culinary innovation, gastronomic experience, destination identity, and regional branding into one analytical framework, specifically in the context of Gresik

Regency. This approach positions local culinary innovation as a strategic resource that not only generates economic value, but also shapes identity, strengthens image, creates authentic experiences, and supports destination competitiveness. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich gastronomy-based regional branding studies, particularly in the context of regencies and cities in Indonesia. Practically, the research results are expected to serve as a reference for local government, culinary MSME actors, and tourism stakeholders in formulating policies, culinary development programs, promotional activities, and integrated and sustainable culinary-based branding and marketing communication strategies (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019).

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the role of local culinary innovation in supporting the regional branding of Gresik Regency by examining the relationship between culinary innovation, gastronomic experience, destination identity, destination image, and destination communication. Specifically, this study aims to identify how innovation in products, processes, packaging, and marketing contributes to the formation of an authentic gastronomic experience and how that experience strengthens the identity and image of Gresik Regency as a tourist destination.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory explains that the competitive advantage of an organisation or region is determined by its ability to utilise resources that are unique, valuable, difficult to imitate, and not easily replaceable (Barney, 1997). In the context of regional development, local resources encompass not only physical assets but also cultural heritage, traditions, local knowledge and distinctive products that have evolved within the community.

Local cuisine is one such strategic resource that meets these characteristics, as it embodies elements of authenticity, cultural identity and differentiation not found in other regions. Virto and Arrospide (2024) explain that local gastronomy can function as a strategic destination resource capable of enhancing a destination's competitiveness through the creation of distinctive and memorable tourist experiences. Therefore, the development of local cuisine through innovation in products, processes, packaging, and marketing can serve as a source of competitive advantage for Gresik Regency in building sustainable regional branding. In this study, the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is used to explain that local culinary innovation involves the utilisation of distinctive regional resources that have the potential to create economic added value whilst strengthening the destination's identity.

### **2.2 The Experience Economy Theory**

The concept of the Experience Economy was first introduced by Pine and Gilmore and has continued to evolve within modern tourism studies. This theory explains that today's consumers do not merely purchase products or services, but also buy experiences that provide emotional impressions and lasting memories.

In the tourism industry, experience is a key factor influencing tourist satisfaction, loyalty and the intention to return. Gastronomic tourism experiences are a form of experience that simultaneously encompasses educational, entertainment, aesthetic and

emotional engagement dimensions. Tourists not only enjoy the food but also learn about the history, culture, traditions and social values associated with the culinary offerings.

Research by Ellis et al. (2018) shows that authentic culinary experiences contribute significantly to the formation of a destination's image and tourist satisfaction. It is also explained that gastronomy is one of the key components in experience-based destination development as it is capable of creating an emotional connection between tourists and the destination they visit. In the context of this study, the gastronomic experience is viewed as a mechanism linking local culinary innovation with the development of regional branding for Gresik Regency.

### **2.3 The Concepts of Regional Branding and Place Branding**

Regional branding is a strategy for managing regional identity that aims to build the image, reputation and competitiveness of a city or region through the utilisation of its local resources. According to Kavaratzis (2019), regional branding is not merely about logos, slogans or destination promotion, but is a process of identity formation that involves various stakeholders in creating a consistent experience for both the local community and tourists.

Place branding has evolved from the concept of regional marketing, which emphasises the importance of identity, perception and experience as the foundation for building a region's reputation. Braun et al. (2018) explain that the success of regional branding is heavily influenced by a region's ability to build place brand equity, the value derived from the positive perceptions held by the public, investors and tourists towards a particular region.

The main components of regional branding include: Identity, the region's unique characteristics; Image, the perception formed in the public's mind; Communication, the communication strategies employed; Experience, the tangible experiences felt by tourists; and Reputation, the long-term assessment of a region. In this study, regional branding is used as the main conceptual variable, which is influenced by local culinary innovation through the creation of gastronomic experiences and destination identity.

### **2.4 Gastronomy Tourism dan Culinary Tourism**

Gastronomy tourism is a form of tourism in which food and drink serve as either the primary or secondary motivation for travel. According to UN Tourism (2024), gastronomy is not only related to the act of eating, but also encompasses the production process, food culture, culinary traditions and the social interactions that accompany them.

In recent years, gastronomic tourism has developed into one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry. Local gastronomy plays a strategic role in destination development as it is able to link culture, the tourist experience and regional economic development within a single destination narrative (Virto & Arrospide, 2024).

Ellis et al. (2018) found that tourists tend to remember culinary experiences for longer than other tourism experiences because they engage multiple senses simultaneously. Consequently, gastronomy plays a vital role in shaping a destination's

image and strengthening tourist loyalty. In this study, gastronomic tourism is viewed as a medium that enables local culinary innovation to contribute to the development of Gresik Regency's regional branding.

## **2.5 Local Culinary Innovations**

Local culinary innovation is a process of renewing products, processes, packaging and marketing whilst preserving cultural identity and local characteristics. Hayward (1998) explain that innovation is the ability of organisations or business operators to create new value through the development of products, processes, market positioning or business models. In the context of local cuisine, innovation can be divided into four main dimensions:

1. Product Innovation, including: new flavour variants, recipe modifications, menu development, and improved nutritional value.
2. Process Innovation, including: production standardisation, hygiene and sanitation, operational efficiency, and quality control.
3. Packaging Innovation, including: visual design, eco-friendly packaging, product storytelling, and brand identity.
4. Marketing Innovation, including: social media, online marketplaces, influencer marketing, and digital branding.

Modern culinary innovation is not only aimed at increasing economic benefits, but also plays a role in strengthening a destination's identity, enhancing the visitor experience, and supporting sustainable tourism development (Virto & Arrospide, 2024; UN Tourism, 2024).

## **2.6 Sustainable Gastronomy and Sustainable Tourism**

The concept of sustainable gastronomy emphasises the importance of managing food systems in a way that supports environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability. According to the FAO (2023), sustainable gastronomy promotes the use of local ingredients, the reduction of food waste, the preservation of culinary culture, and the empowerment of local communities.

Béné et al. (2020) explain that the development of sustainable local food systems can enhance the economic resilience of communities whilst strengthening regional identity. In the context of tourist destinations, the principle of sustainability is crucial to ensuring that the development of gastronomic tourism not only generates short-term economic benefits but is also capable of preserving local cultural heritage and the environment.

For Gresik Regency, the development of local cuisine based on seafood, traditional products and SMEs can form part of a sustainable development strategy that supports regional branding whilst improving community welfare.

## **2.7 Conceptual Framework of the Research**

The conceptual model of this study illustrates that local culinary innovations are a key factor influencing tourists' gastronomic experiences. These experiences

subsequently contribute to the formation of the region's identity, image and reputation, which ultimately strengthen the regional branding of Gresik Regency.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Research

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Types and Research Approaches

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study methodology. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of local culinary innovation and its role in supporting the regional branding of Gresik Regency. This phenomenon is not only related to economic aspects but also involves social and cultural dimensions, local identity, tourist experiences, and the interactions of various stakeholders, which cannot be adequately explained through a purely quantitative approach.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or humanitarian issue. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how MSME operators, local government, destination managers and tourists interpret culinary innovation as part of the identity and image of Gresik Regency.

A case study strategy was employed as the research focuses on a specific region, namely Gresik Regency, which possesses unique characteristics in the form of a blend of religious tourism, historical tourism, and a wealth of local culinary traditions. The case study approach enables the researcher to examine the phenomenon in depth within a real-life context, thereby allowing the relationship between local culinary innovation and regional branding to be understood more holistically and contextually (Yin, 2023).

#### 3.2 Research Location and Time

The research was conducted in Gresik Regency, East Java Province. The choice of location was based on several considerations. Firstly, Gresik Regency boasts a diverse

range of traditional culinary specialties that have become an integral part of the local community's cultural identity, such as *nasi krawu*, *pudak*, *bonggolan*, *jubung*, and various seafood dishes. Secondly, Gresik Regency possesses significant potential for religious and heritage tourism, thereby enabling the integration of culinary tourism with the development of experience-based tourism destinations. Thirdly, the local government has prioritised the tourism and creative economy sectors as key areas for regional development, meaning this research is highly relevant to the region's development needs.



Figure 2. Map of Gresik Regency

Data collection is scheduled to take place over five months (January-May 2026), covering the preparation phase, field data collection, data analysis and the drafting of the research report. These stages will be carried out sequentially to ensure that the data collection and analysis processes are conducted thoroughly and systematically.

### 3.3 Research Informants

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique whereby informants are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This technique was chosen because not all individuals possess sufficient knowledge and experience regarding local culinary innovations or the development of Gresik Regency's regional branding. The research informants comprised several main groups, namely local government representatives responsible for tourism and the creative economy, operators of local culinary micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), tourism destination managers, academics with expertise in tourism or the creative economy, and tourists who had visited and enjoyed the distinctive cuisine of Gresik Regency. It is hoped that the diversity of these informants will provide a more comprehensive perspective on the current state of local culinary development and its contribution to the formation of regional identity. This study involved informants consisting of culinary MSME actors, tourist destination managers, and tourists. The selection of informants in each group was based on involvement, knowledge, and experience relevant to the research focus. Local government representatives were selected based on their involvement in tourism and creative economy development, MSME actors were selected based on active involvement

in the development and marketing of local culinary products, destination managers were selected based on their involvement in the management or promotion of tourist destinations, academics were selected based on expertise in the field of tourism or creative economy, while tourists were selected based on their experience visiting and enjoying the distinctive culinary offerings of Gresik Regency. The selection of these various informant groups was carried out to obtain diverse perspectives on local culinary innovation, gastronomic experience, regional identity, and its role in supporting the regional branding of Gresik Regency.

### **3.4 Types and Data Sources**

This study utilised two types of data: primary and secondary data. Primary data consists of the main data obtained directly from informants through in-depth interviews and field observations. Primary data was used to explore information regarding the forms of culinary innovation undertaken by business operators, perceptions of local culinary identity, the marketing strategies employed, and stakeholders' views on the relationship between cuisine and regional branding in Gresik Regency. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through a review of relevant sources, such as local government policy documents, reports on the development of the tourism and creative economy sectors, regional statistical data, academic articles, national and international journals, and official publications relating to culinary development and regional branding. Secondary data was used to strengthen the analysis and provide a broader context for the field findings.

### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, field observation and documentary research. The in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using a pre-prepared interview guide. This technique enables the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding the informants' experiences, perceptions and views on local culinary innovations and their contribution to the regional branding of Gresik Regency. The interviews were conducted flexibly so that the researcher could explore various issues that arose during the research process.

In addition to interviews, this study also utilised field observation. Observations were carried out at culinary centres, MSME production sites, tourist areas, and various promotional activities related to local cuisine. Through observation, the researcher was able to gain a realistic picture of production processes, packaging innovations, marketing activities, and interactions between business operators and consumers.

The third technique was a documentary study. Documentation was used to supplement data from interviews and observations by collecting photographs, promotional brochures, social media content, government policy documents, activity reports, and various other documents relevant to the research focus. The use of these various data collection techniques aimed to enhance the depth and comprehensiveness of the information obtained.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Techniques**

The data obtained were analysed using thematic analysis, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2023). Thematic analysis was chosen because it enables the systematic identification, organisation and interpretation of patterns of meaning emerging from qualitative data.

The analysis process began with repeatedly reading and understanding all the data from the interviews, observations and documentation. The next stage involved coding the information deemed relevant to the research focus. Codes sharing similar meanings were then grouped into main themes relating to product innovation, process innovation, packaging innovation, marketing innovation, tourism experiences, regional identity, and regional branding.

Once the main themes had been established, the researcher carried out an interpretation by linking the field findings with theory and the results of previous research. It is hoped that this process will provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which local culinary innovation contributes to the formation of Gresik Regency's regional branding.

### **3.7 Data Validity**

To ensure the credibility and validity of the research results, several data validation techniques were employed. The first technique was source triangulation, which involved comparing information obtained from various groups of informants, such as the local government, MSME operators, academics, destination managers and tourists. This technique was employed to ensure the consistency of information obtained from various perspectives.

The second technique was methodological triangulation, which involved comparing the results of interviews, observations and documentation. The use of various data collection methods enables the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study.

Furthermore, this study also employs member checking, which is the process of reconfirming the results of interpretation with several key informants to ensure that the research findings align with their experiences and perspectives. This technique is important for enhancing the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation and reducing the likelihood of bias.

### **3.8 Operational Framework of the Research**

Operationally, this research is based on the assumption that local cuisine is a strategic regional resource that can be developed through various forms of innovation. These innovations include product innovation, production processes, packaging, and digital marketing. Culinary innovation subsequently generates gastronomic experiences capable of strengthening the identity and image of Gresik Regency. Furthermore, the resulting identity and image contribute to the strengthening of regional branding and the sustainable enhancement of the destination's competitiveness.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 An Overview of Gresik Regency as a Venue for the Development of Culinary-Based Regional branding

Gresik Regency is one of the strategic regions in East Java Province, characterised by its role as a hub for industry, trade, religious education and historical tourism. Its geographical location on the northern coast of East Java has given Gresik a long history as an international trading port, dating back to the era of the Majapahit Kingdom through to the spread of Islam across the archipelago. These conditions have shaped a cultural diversity reflected in local traditions, heritage sites, and a variety of distinctive culinary specialities that have evolved to the present day.

As well as being known as the 'City of Santri', Gresik Regency boasts a number of culinary specialities that have become part of its local identity, such as *Nasi Krawu*, *Pudak Gresik*, *Bonggolan*, *Otak-Otak Bandeng*, *Jenang Jubung*, and various other processed seafood products. The existence of these culinary specialities demonstrates that the culinary sector not only serves as an economic activity for the community but is also part of the cultural heritage with the potential to be developed as a tourist attraction.



Figure 3. Traditional Gresik MSME Food Products (*Nasi Krawu*, *Pudak*, *Bonggolan*, *Otak-otak Bandeng*, *Jenang Jubung*)

This finding is consistent with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1997), which explains that a region's competitive advantage can be built through the utilisation of resources that are unique, valuable and difficult for other regions to replicate. In the context of Gresik Regency, local cuisine can be regarded as a strategic resource with the potential to shape regional identity and strengthen regional branding.

## 4.2 Research Findings

### 4.2.1 Innovations in Local Culinary Products in Gresik Regency

The findings from observations and interviews indicate that, in general, operators of food-based MSMEs in Gresik Regency have implemented various forms of product innovation in an effort to enhance competitiveness and expand their market reach. These innovations do not alter the core characteristics of the products, but are instead focused on increasing added value, offering product variety, and adapting to the needs of modern consumers.

In the case of Bonggolan, for example, innovation has taken the form of developing ready-to-cook products, frozen foods, and vacuum-sealed packaging, which allows the products to have a longer shelf life. Meanwhile, for Puduk Gresik, innovation has involved diversifying flavours and developing premium packaging designed for use as tourist souvenirs.

The research findings indicate that local culinary innovation in Gresik Regency aligns with the concept of 'culinary destination enchantment'; the ability of local gastronomy to create destination appeal through a combination of cultural authenticity, tourist experiences and product innovation (Virto & Arrospide, 2024). This aligns with the concept of innovation put forward by Hayward (1998), which states that innovation does not always mean creating new products, but can take the form of enhancing the value of existing products through modification and continuous development.

Consequently, this product innovation contributes to increasing the economic value of the products, expanding the market, enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, and strengthening the culinary identity of Gresik Regency.



Figure 4. Modern Bonggolan Products and Vacuum Packaging

#### 4.2.2 Production Process Innovation and Quality Standardisation

The research findings indicate that some MSME operators have begun to adopt more modern production practices through the standardisation of recipes, the implementation of food hygiene and sanitation measures, and product quality control. These changes have been driven by growing awareness amongst business operators of the importance of food safety and the demands of an increasingly competitive market.

The implementation of process innovations is evident in the use of more efficient production equipment, more hygienic packaging, and simple record-keeping of production processes. Nevertheless, several constraints remain, including limited capital, low human resource capacity, and the uneven distribution of business certification. These findings indicate that process innovation is a key factor in building consumer trust and strengthening the image of local products. The results of this study support the concept of sustainable gastronomy, which emphasises the importance of quality, food safety, and supply chain sustainability in the development of gastronomic tourism (Béné et al., 2020). Consequently, these process innovations result in more consistent product quality,

increased consumer confidence, opportunities to enter modern markets, and an enhanced reputation for local cuisine.

#### 4.2.3 Packaging Innovation as a Medium for Regional Storytelling

The research findings indicate significant changes in the packaging strategies for local culinary products. Packaging no longer serves merely to protect the product, but also acts as a communication medium that conveys the region's identity to consumers. Some MSMEs have adopted visual designs featuring cultural icons of Gresik, historical information about the product, business logos, halal certification, and QR codes linking to digital media. This approach demonstrates an understanding that packaging can serve as a means of building product experiences and brand image.

These findings are consistent with the Place Branding theory proposed by Braun et al. (2018), which explains that regional identity can be communicated through various media, including products and packaging. Consequently, product packaging plays a vital role as a medium for regional promotion, a vehicle for cultural education, a brand communication tool, and a reinforcer of Gresik Regency's identity.



Figure 5. One example of a storytelling-based packaging innovation for Bonggol products

#### 4.2.4 Digital Marketing Innovation

The research findings indicate that digital media has become a key tool in expanding the local culinary market. The majority of MSMEs have utilised Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp Business and online marketplaces as promotional channels.

Tourists interviewed stated that information about Gresik's signature cuisine is more frequently obtained via social media than through conventional promotional media. This situation indicates that the process of shaping a destination's image is currently taking place digitally through user experiences and recommendations (user-generated content). These findings reinforce the research by Pedeliento and Kavaratzis (2019), which explains that social media has a significant influence on shaping consumer perceptions of culinary destinations.

Consequently, digital marketing contributes to increased product visibility, expanded market reach, the strengthening of digital regional branding, and enhanced interaction between tourists and the destination.



Figure 6. MSME Promotional Activities via Social Media

### 4.3 Discussion

#### 4.3.1 The Role of Culinary Innovation in Supporting the Regional branding of Gresik Regency

The research results show that local culinary innovation in Gresik Regency functions not only to increase the economic value of products, but also as an instrument in shaping a tourism experience that is connected to regional identity. Innovation in products, processes, packaging, and digital marketing creates points of interaction between tourists and products, culture, business actors, and Gresik's local narrative. Thus, culinary value does not stop at consumption activity, but develops into a gastronomic experience that allows tourists to recognize the region's social and cultural character.

In the Experience Economy perspective, experience is an increasingly important value because tourists seek not only products, but also impressions, emotional engagement, and memories that can be carried after the visit. The research findings show that innovation in products such as Bonggolan, Pudak, and other distinctive culinary offerings allows traditional products to adapt to the needs of modern tourists without losing their basic character. The development of ready-to-cook products, frozen food, vacuum packaging, flavor variations, and premium packaging expands the function of culinary offerings from mere food into part of the tourism experience and souvenirs. This condition is in line with Ellis et al. (2018), who position culinary experience as an important part of the destination experience because it engages multiple senses while shaping tourists' memory of a place.

This experience becomes even stronger when product innovation is combined with packaging innovation and storytelling. Packaging that contains cultural identity, product history information, business logos, halal certification, and QR codes not only increases visual appeal, but also provides information about the origin and character of the product. Thus, tourists receive experience not only through taste, but also through information and

cultural symbols attached to the product. In this context, culinary offerings become a medium that connects the consumption experience with an understanding of Gresik as a region with a particular history, tradition, and cultural character.

Digital marketing innovation then extends this experience into digital space. The finding that tourists obtain information about Gresik's culinary offerings through social media shows that the destination experience can be formed even before tourists physically arrive. Visual content, user recommendations, and digital interaction shape expectations about the culinary offerings they will encounter in Gresik. After the visit, this experience has the potential to be disseminated through user-generated content, so that individual experience can develop into broader destination communication. This finding reinforces the view of Pedeliento and Kavaratzis (2019) regarding the relationship between culture, identity, and image in the formation of place brand.

Thus, culinary innovation shapes the Gresik experience through three interrelated stages, namely consumption experience, cultural experience, and digital experience. Consumption experience arises through taste, quality, packaging, and product uniqueness; cultural experience arises through the stories, traditions, and local character attached to the culinary offerings; while digital experience is formed through promotion, recommendations, and interaction on social media. The integration of these three experiences gives culinary offerings a greater capacity to become part of the destination experience, not merely an economic product.

#### **4.3.2 Culinary Innovation as an Implementation of the Resource-Based View**

The relationship between culinary innovation and regional branding cannot be separated from the process of regional identity formation. Identity is the character that a region wishes to display and maintain, while image is the perception formed among external parties based on the experience and information they receive. In the context of Gresik, culinary offerings such as Nasi Krawu, Puduk, Bonggolan, Otak-Otak Bandeng, and Jenang Jubung carry identity value because they are rooted in the history, tradition, and life of the local community. The research findings show that innovation does not eliminate this character, but instead gives it a new form so that the culinary identity can be accepted by today's consumers and tourists.

From a Place Branding perspective, this condition is essential since destination identity cannot be sufficiently communicated only through slogans or government promotion. Identity needs to be present at various contact points that are genuinely experienced by the community and tourists. Culinary products become one of these contact points. When elements of Gresik's culture are incorporated into packaging design, product narrative, marketing processes, and consumption experience, regional identity becomes more concrete and can be felt. This is in line with Braun et al. (2018), who explain that the formation of place reputation is shaped by the relationship between the identity being built and the image formed among the public.

Culinary innovation also plays a role in building differentiation of Gresik's image. A region with culinary products that have a distinctive character has the opportunity to build particular associations in tourists' memory. In the case of Gresik, the culinary

wealth related to coastal community traditions, trading history, and the development of culture and religion provides a basis for forming an image different from other destinations. This means that innovation is not merely about making products more modern, but ensuring that this modernization still carries attributes that allow consumers to recognize their connection to Gresik.

The finding regarding storytelling-based packaging is important in this mechanism. When information about the history, culture, and character of the product is displayed on the packaging, the product functions as a medium for communicating identity. Thus, tourists who buy Gresik culinary offerings as souvenirs carry not only the product, but also a symbolic representation of the product's region of origin. This process can extend the reach of Gresik's identity from the physical destination space to consumption space outside the region.

At the same time, digital marketing strengthens image formation because it allows this identity to be communicated repeatedly and to reach a wider audience. Social media allows Gresik's culinary offerings to be displayed through product visuals, business actors' stories, tourist experiences, and user recommendations. Hence, Gresik's image is formed not only through the government's institutional communication, but also through interaction among MSME actors, tourists, and digital media users. This finding shows that regional branding is a collective process involving various stakeholders, as stated by Kavaratzis (2019).

From the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, the research findings show that local culinary offerings can be positioned as a strategic regional resource because they possess elements of uniqueness, cultural value, and connection to local history that are relatively difficult for other regions to replicate identically. Nasi Krawu, Pudak, Bonggolan, Otak-Otak Bandeng, and Jenang Jubung are not merely products with economic value, but cultural assets attached to Gresik's identity. This position is consistent with Barney (1997), who explains that competitive advantage can be built through the utilization of resources that are valuable, unique, difficult to imitate, and not easily substituted.

However, the existence of a unique resource does not automatically produce competitive advantage. This resource must be processed through appropriate innovation capability and management. The research findings show that this process takes place through product innovation, improvement of production quality, packaging development, and utilization of digital technology. Innovation functions as a mechanism that transforms culinary heritage into value that is more relevant to the modern market without severing the connection with local identity.

In this context, Gresik's competitiveness is not determined solely by the ability to sell more culinary products, but by the ability to create destination differentiation. Authentic and innovative culinary offerings can give tourists additional reasons to recognize, visit, and remember Gresik. The integration of culinary offerings, religious tourism, and heritage tourism as found in the research also extends the position of culinary offerings from a supporting product into one component of the destination

experience. This is in line with Virto and Arrospide (2024), who position local gastronomy as a strategic resource in creating destination attractiveness and competitiveness.

Thus, the competitiveness built through culinary innovation is multidimensional. At the economic level, innovation increases added value and expands the MSME market. At the cultural level, innovation helps preserve while also communicating culinary heritage to modern consumers. At the tourism level, innovation enriches the tourist experience. At the branding level, innovation creates differentiation and associations that can strengthen Gresik's identity, image, and reputation. This relationship shows that local culinary offerings can become a source of competitive advantage when managed as part of a destination ecosystem, rather than as a standalone product.

#### 4.3.3 A Model for Regional branding Development Based on Local Culinary Innovation

Based on the research findings, a conceptual model for the development of Gresik Regency's regional branding can be formulated as follows:



**Figure 6: A Model for Regional branding Development Based on Local Culinary Innovation**

Based on the overall findings, the role of culinary innovation in the regional branding of Gresik Regency can be understood through a relationship that is both sequential and mutually reinforcing. Local culinary resources serve as the initial foundation because they provide uniqueness and authenticity. These resources are then developed through product, process, packaging, and digital marketing innovation. Innovation produces a gastronomic experience that is more appealing, safe, informative, and memorable. This experience then contributes to the formation of identity and image, while consistency of quality and repeated experience strengthens reputation. At the next stage, positive identity, image, and reputation produce differentiation and destination competitiveness.

This relationship shows that Gresik's regional branding should not be placed merely as a communication or promotion activity. Branding needs to be understood as a

consequence of the quality of local resources and the experience genuinely felt by tourists. In other words, promotion will become stronger if the message conveyed about Gresik is supported by a culinary experience that is authentic, innovative, consistent, and able to represent regional identity. This view is in line with Kavaratzis (2019) and Pedeliento and Kavaratzis (2019), who place identity, experience, communication, and perception as interrelated parts in the formation of place brand.

This finding also extends the understanding of the application of RBV in the destination context. Local culinary offerings are not merely an available resource, but become a source of advantage when local government, MSMEs, destination managers, and other stakeholders have the ability to orchestrate that resource into a valuable experience. Therefore, Gresik's advantage lies not only in the ownership of distinctive culinary offerings, but in the ability to maintain authenticity while carrying out innovation so that the culinary offerings remain relevant to changing tourist needs.

Overall, the research results show that local culinary resources hold a strategic position in the process of developing regional branding for Gresik Regency. The existence of culinary resources with distinctive characteristics rooted in local history and culture serves as the foundation for developing innovation that can increase product relevance to the needs of contemporary tourists and consumers. This innovation subsequently contributes to the formation of a gastronomic experience that is not only consumptive in nature, but also provides cultural, symbolic, and emotional dimensions in the tourism experience. A positive and authentic gastronomic experience then plays a role in strengthening identity and shaping the image of Gresik Regency as a destination with a distinctive cultural and culinary character. When this experience takes place consistently and is supported by product quality and sustainable destination communication, the accumulation of positive perception can develop into a stronger destination reputation. Ultimately, the connection between identity, image, and reputation contributes to the differentiation and competitiveness of Gresik Regency in an increasingly competitive tourism environment.

These findings confirm that culinary innovation cannot be understood merely as a strategy for increasing the economic value of products or expanding the MSME market. In the Resource-Based View perspective, innovation functions as a mechanism for managing and developing local resources so as to produce strategic value for the destination. Meanwhile, in the Experience Economy perspective, innovation allows culinary resources to be translated into experiences that have value for tourists. The integration of these two perspectives shows that Gresik's culinary advantage is determined not only by the existence of distinctive products, but also by the ability of stakeholders to develop, communicate, and present these resources as part of the destination experience. Therefore, the development of Gresik Culinary Heritage Branding through the integration of culinary tourism, religious tourism, and heritage tourism has strategic relevance in strengthening destination identity, improving the quality of public perception, and building the competitiveness of Gresik Regency as a culture and gastronomy based destination.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the research results, local culinary innovation in Gresik Regency develops across four main dimensions, namely product innovation, process innovation, packaging innovation, and digital marketing innovation. This innovation is carried out while still maintaining the characteristics and identity of local culinary offerings, while also increasing added value, quality, market reach, and the competitiveness of culinary products.

Local culinary innovation also plays a role in supporting the regional branding of Gresik Regency through the creation of an authentic gastronomic experience. Product and process innovation increase quality and consumer trust, packaging innovation functions as a medium for conveying regional identity and story, while digital marketing expands the visibility of local culinary offerings and shapes destination perception through tourist experience and recommendations. Thus, local culinary offerings function not only as an economic product, but also as a strategic resource in strengthening the identity, image, and reputation of Gresik Regency as a culture and culinary based tourism destination.

This study produces a conceptual model of Local Culinary Innovation Based Regional Branding that positions local culinary innovation as a strategic resource in building gastronomic experience, strengthening destination identity and image, and supporting the competitiveness of Gresik Regency. This model shows that the development of culinary based regional branding can be built through the connection between local culinary wealth, innovation, gastronomic experience, destination identity, image, and regional branding strengthening.

Based on the research findings, the Gresik Regency Government together with relevant stakeholders need to develop a regional branding strategy that integrates local culinary potential with gastronomic tourism, heritage tourism, and religious tourism. This strategy can be strengthened through the development of culinary festivals, integrated digital promotion, and the creation of tourist areas that connect culinary experience with Gresik's historical and cultural identity.

Culinary MSME actors need to increase product innovation, production process quality, packaging design and function, and the utilization of digital marketing while still maintaining the authenticity and cultural value of local culinary offerings. Universities and research institutions can also play a role through mentoring, training, and the development of studies on culinary innovation and regional branding. Future research can use quantitative or mixed methods approaches to more deeply measure the influence of culinary innovation on destination image, tourist satisfaction, gastronomic experience, and the success of regional branding in Gresik Regency and other regions in Indonesia.

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